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THE PAPERS OF WILLIAM ABERHART AS
MINISTER OF EDUCATION, 1935-1943

by



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A THESIS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "The Papers of William Aberhart as Minister of Education, 1935-1943" submitted by Barrie Connolly Oviatt in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

ABSTRACT

As a result of the provincial election in 1935, Albertans anticipated change. In the field of education change came quickly. William Aberhart assumed the portfolio of Minister of Education and introduced a series of changes which were of some consequence. In April 1936, legislation was enacted which established large units of school administration for Alberta. In the same session, the Alberta Teachers' Association was appreciably strengthened by the enactment of compulsory membership on the part of all teachers within the province. A new curriculum and methodology were introduced in September of that same year. Not only did these changes constitute major alterations in Alberta, but they were significant across the whole of Canada as they placed Alberta at the forefront of educational reform.

The changes introduced by the Social Credit administration in 1936 were not new to the province. Consideration of the large unit of school administration had been formally introduced as early as 1927 by Aberhart's predecessor, Perren Baker. The Alberta Teachers' Association had been pressing for compulsory teacher membership since its inception as a professional organization in 1917. The United Farmers of Alberta had not been able to consolidate opinion on these two important issues and had therefore shown a reluctance to act. Curriculum revision had begun in 1934

and was well underway by 1935 when Social Credit came to power.

Examination of the papers of the Minister of Education revealed that there was a great deal of opposition expressed against the provision of the large units of school administration. Of the changes made, this undoubtedly caused the greatest concern to the people of the province. The changes relating to compulsory professional membership for teachers and the new curriculum and methodology, judging from the contents of the Minister's papers, did not constitute major areas of difficulty.

It was apparent from the review of the Minister's papers that a number of other matters came to his attention. Generally speaking, these concerns were of interest to fewer people and did not constitute prolonged problems for the Minister. During his tenure, Aberhart was called upon to deal with such matters as the qualification of electors for school elections, the place in the classroom of such content as patriotic exercises and evolutionary theory, and the payment of salary arrears to teachers. Many of these complaints were associated with the fact that the complainants were misinformed or uninformed as to the legal situation. Aberhart chose to deal with most of these complaints by providing the necessary relevant information. Under his direction and support, the Government assumed responsibility for payment of debts to teachers.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of the more remarkable political upsets in Canadian history occurred on August 22, 1935 when the first Social Credit government in the world was elected in the Province of Alberta. This political victory was led by William Aberhart, a Calgary high school principal and the Dean of the Prophetic Bible Institute. Surprisingly, the Social Credit organization which was a relative newcomer to the political arena and was represented by an inexperienced group of politicians, functioned flawlessly, much to the consternation of the three other contending parties.¹ Of the sixty-three provincial seats in Alberta, Social Credit won fifty-six, the Liberals five, the Conservatives two, and the United Farmers of Alberta, the former governing party of the province, did not return a single candidate.² The contending parties were completely shaken at the magnitude of their failure. Interestingly enough, William Aberhart and his followers were equally surprised at their astounding success. Most of the Social Credit candidates

¹ J. A. Irving, The Social Credit Movement in Alberta. (Toronto, 1959), p. 331.

² "Returns: General Election of the Province of Alberta." August 22, 1935. The Social Credit League, Edmonton. Hereafter cited "Returns." August 22, 1935.

had hoped that they would "form His Majesty's Loyal Opposition."³ Even Aberhart, who had not contested a seat, was amazed at the degree of success of his party. At the first caucus meeting following the election, he was formally nominated as leader and upon the voluntary withdrawal of William Morrison, the successful candidate for Okotoks - High River, Aberhart gained a seat in the Alberta Legislature by acclamation.⁴

There were numerous concerns confronting the new government in the midst of the economic depression. One of the more practical problems for the functioning of government was the designation of men as the cabinet ministers in the new administration. Aberhart led a contingent of eleven teachers into the new Legislature,⁵ and thus there were several candidates for the portfolio associated with the Department of Education. Dr. G. Fred McNally, Acting Deputy Minister, actually told Aberhart shortly following the election, "When you are selecting your Minister of Education, don't overlook yourself."⁶ Although Aberhart was supposed-

³ N. B. James, The Autobiography of a Nobody. (Toronto, 1947), p. 196.

⁴ "Returns." August 22, 1935.

⁵ H. J. Schultz, "William Aberhart and the Social Credit Party; A Political Biography," Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Duke University, 1959, p. 185.

⁶ H. T. Coutts and B. E. Walker, G. Fred (Don Mills, 1964), p. 70.

ly quite surprised at this suggestion, when the cabinet posts were announced he was listed as the Minister of Education. This position was one which he held until his death in May 1943.

From 1935 to 1943, the period corresponding to Aberhart's tenure as Minister of Education, a number of educational changes of major importance were made. These included the introduction of large units of school administration into Alberta, the adoption of a new curriculum and methodology, and the granting of a number of important guarantees to teachers. Many of these changes were at the forefront of educational change in Canada and later provided a pattern for similar innovations in other provinces.⁷

Large units of school administration had been an issue of public concern in Alberta even before 1935. Their advantages had been advocated by Perren Baker, Minister of Education in the United Farmers of Alberta government.⁸ Even though the large units of administration in Alberta were visualized as practicable in this earlier period, their actual innovation was completed during Aberhart's term as Minister of Education.

⁷ See T. Cole, The Canadian Bureaucracy, (Durham, 1949), p. 262, and Fulton Oursler, "Little Red (Tape) Schoolhouse," Liberty Magazine, February 11, 1939, p. 3 for discussions of Alberta's leading role in educational change in Canada.

⁸ See L. J. Wilson, "Perren Baker, the U.F.A. and Education in Alberta." Unpublished M.Ed. thesis, University of Alberta, 1970.

The adoption of the new curriculum and methodology in Alberta also began during this period. Much speculation exists as to how these changes in educational practice were received in the province. Regarded by some as a "revolt against the traditional school,"⁹ others have regarded these changes somewhat differently. As one study suggests, "discontent was apparent in Alberta in the 1920's, but it was heightened by the impact of the Depression and the political campaigns of the mid-1930's. People were ready for change. They were at a low ebb and willing to try something new."¹⁰ Although the major changes in curriculum and methodology took place during the post-1935 period, they had been anticipated before the 1935 election and were aspects of Alberta's education that the new administration inherited from the earlier period.

In 1936 the new Social Credit administration passed some legislation which made certain guarantees to teachers. Known as "An Act to amend The Teaching Profession Act, 1935," the most notable feature of this legislation was that it made membership in the Alberta Teachers' Association compulsory for all teachers in the province. This change in the teachers' position was rooted in legislation of the

⁹ G. K. Sheane, "The History of the Curriculum of the Elementary School in Alberta." Unpublished D. Paed. thesis, University of Toronto, 1948, p. 115.

¹⁰ R. S. Patterson, "The Establishment of Progressive Education in Alberta." Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Michigan State University, 1968, p. 172.

earlier administration in Alberta.

Statement of the Problem

The Social Credit party came into power with a mandate for change. Immediately there were changes in educational policy and practice. There is a need to explore the degree to which Aberhart and Social Credit were responsible for these changes. The central issues of this thesis will thus be focused upon the following three questions:

- (i) To what extent were William Aberhart and Social Credit responsible for the changes in educational policy and practice of the period 1935 to 1943?
- (ii) What were the educational problems of the period 1935 to 1943 as seen through the Ministerial papers of William Aberhart?
- (iii) What solutions were offered by the Minister in attempting to alleviate the discontent associated with these problems?

Delimitations of the Study

Rather than attempting to deal with the total career of William Aberhart, this study concentrates on the problems in which he was centrally involved as Minister of Education.

The major source of data for this study is the Minister's papers, although supplementary information has been gleaned from interviews, other public documents, newspapers and secondary sources. Individuals interviewed for this study were contacted once.

Limitations of the Study

The writer recognizes that this study may be limited due to the following circumstances:

The Minister's papers may be incomplete in several areas. Not all of the educational problems of the period may have faced the Minister. Those problems which were his concern may have been handled in ways other than through correspondence. In that the criteria for selecting what constituted an educational problem at the Ministerial level was the amount of public response to the issues involved as well as the volume and nature of response to these issues by the Minister, there could be omissions.

These papers show that several problems which possibly could have become of major concern to the Minister became responsibilities of the Deputy Minister and other lesser departmental officials. Two cases were the establishment of a teachers' retirement fund, transferred to the Deputy Minister, and the introduction of the new curriculum which became largely the responsibility Dr. H. C. Newland, Chief Superintendent of Schools. Only later did the Minister become much involved. Thus the full significance of some problems may not be revealed in the Minister's papers.

Public response may be limited in the Minister's papers because of general unawareness or lack of interest in the issues involved.

Need for the Study

Although two extensive studies of the rise of Social Credit and of Aberhart's political ascendancy have been undertaken by Harold J. Schultz¹¹ and John A. Irving,¹² little attention has been paid to his work as Minister of Education. During his tenure in office, Aberhart was personally involved in many educational changes. Since some of these changes became permanent features, they are essential in understanding Alberta's educational development. Further, since Aberhart was himself a teacher and educational administrator prior to the electoral success of Social Credit in 1935, the impact of these experiences upon his legislative career, and to an even greater extent upon his activities and decisions as Minister of Education, become important considerations for this study. The thesis is also a natural extension of earlier studies completed in regard to education under Perren Baker, Minister of Education during the administration of the United Farmers of Alberta.¹³

In that this study focuses on educational problems of the period 1935 to 1943, as viewed through the Minister's papers (not available to scholars until the spring of 1970), a new source of historical data on this subject is examined.

¹¹ Supra, p. 2, n. 5.

¹² Supra, p. 1, n. 1.

¹³ Supra, p. 3, n. 8.

Being a unique source of information, the Minister's papers as utilized in this study provide an avenue for exploration of the educational problems of this period heretofore unconsidered.

Review of Related Literature

As well as the aforementioned studies of Social Credit and Aberhart completed by Schultz and Irving, a biography utilizing the personal Aberhart family papers has been completed by O. J. MacNutt and L. P. V. Johnson.¹⁴ Mrs. MacNutt, Aberhart's daughter, supplements information of the family papers with personal reminiscences of her father's life.

Studies dealing with the large units of school administration include Gilles¹⁵ and Goresky.¹⁶ Gilles' study discusses the establishment of the first fifty large units in Alberta and attempts to assess the contributions of this system to the improvement of educational facilities in rural areas. It also narrates the legislative framework within

¹⁴ O. J. MacNutt and L. P. V. Johnson, Aberhart of Alberta. (Edmonton, 1970).

¹⁵ J. W. Gilles, "School Divisions in Alberta: Their Organization, Operation, and Contributions to Educational Progress." Unpublished M.Ed. thesis, University of Alberta, 1942.

¹⁶ I. Goresky, "The Beginning and Growth of the Alberta School System." Unpublished M.Ed. thesis, University of Alberta, 1944.

which they operated as well as records of achievement from 1937 to 1941. Goresky, in his study, attempts to give a general overview of the development of Alberta's school system. He includes a discussion of the early development of the proposals for establishing the large units as well as a brief discussion of their first years of operation. Wilson's contribution has been cited previously. Bailey¹⁷ has completed a study on the activities of the Alberta Teachers' Association in regards to their struggle for tenure, pensions, and more central to this study, professional status for teachers.

Theses dealing with aspects of curriculum change in Alberta include Chiste,¹⁸ Sheane,¹⁹ Patterson,²⁰ and Oviatt.²¹ Chiste deals primarily with a descriptive account of the 'enterprise' program of 1936, and identifies some of the factors which influenced the change. Sheane attempts an examination of the major curriculum revisions in Alberta

¹⁷ W. S. Bailey, "The Influence of the Alberta Teachers' Association on Educational Legislation in Alberta 1918-1948." Unpublished Ed.D. thesis, Stanford University, 1956.

¹⁸ A. Chiste, "The Development of the Elementary Social Studies Programme in Alberta." Unpublished M.Ed. thesis, University of Alberta, 1963.

¹⁹ Supra, p. 4, n. 9.

²⁰ Supra, p. 4, n. 10.

²¹ P. E. Oviatt, "The Educational Contributions of H. C. Newland." Unpublished M.Ed. thesis, University of Alberta, 1970.

to 1947, and gives an assessment of the effectiveness of the major characteristics of each. The study by Patterson analyzes the reasons for the adoption of progressive education in Alberta in 1936 and identifies some of the major influences bringing about its introduction. Oviatt discusses the contribution and involvement of one of the central figures in curriculum revision of the period, Dr. H. C. Newland.

While several of these studies have touched on the central issues of change during the period 1935 to 1943, none have attempted to identify specific problems associated with this time span. Only a very limited number of historical sketches of the personal involvement of individuals central to these problems have been undertaken, and it is felt that this study will be a contribution in this area.

Source Material

The major sources of information for this thesis were the Minister's papers, available at the Provincial Archives in Edmonton. Files, arranged topically under the general heading 'Education', made possible a thorough examination of the educational problems evident. In recognition of the possible incompleteness of these papers, supplementary data were collected from newspapers, interviews, public documents and completed works. These sources were necessary to fill in background essential to the study and to clarify the

magnitude of the problems and the solutions proposed by the Minister.

Content Organization

Chapter II deals with the rise of William Aberhart to the office of Premier and Minister of Education. A discussion of his activities which led him into the political contest of 1935 is included as well as the essential background leading to his assumption of office.

Chapter III is concerned with the problems involved in establishing the large units of school administration in Alberta. A brief discussion of the earlier proposals and experiments is included as well as the actual legislation leading to their establishment. Opposition and support for the large units is considered along with the results of the early years of their operation.

Chapter IV discusses the issue of the introduction of the new curriculum into Alberta beginning in 1936. Problems associated with curriculum committees and recommendations are discussed.

Chapter V deals with teachers' professionalization. Conditions creating the demands for professionalization and the activities of the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Alberta Trustees' Association in regard to this issue are discussed. The actual legislation regarding professionalization and the public reaction to it are also included.

Chapter VI discusses the University of Alberta's

denial of an honorary degree to Aberhart in 1941.

Chapter VII is a discussion of some of the general educational problems of the period 1935 to 1943. These include the qualifications of an elector for school elections, patriotic exercises and the theory of evolution in Alberta's classrooms, and unpaid teachers' salaries. Public response to each is noted.

Chapter VIII summarizes the degree of involvement of Aberhart and Social Credit in the educational changes of the period. Educational problems and solutions offered by Aberhart as revealed in the Minister's papers are also summarized.

CHAPTER II

WILLIAM ABERHART: HIS RISE TO THE OFFICE OF PREMIER AND MINISTER OF EDUCATION

Since 1935, when Aberhart became Premier of Alberta and Minister of Education, several interpretations of his political success have been offered. One authority has viewed the rise of Aberhart and the Social Credit movement in Alberta "as a phenomenon of mass psychology."¹ Another interprets the success of Social Credit in terms of the leadership of Aberhart.² Others have seen Aberhart as an opportunist riding on the wind of change and ending up quite happily with the reins of power as Alberta's chief executive,³ while still others have interpreted his rise in economic terms with his political support contingent upon the "smouldering resentment of a debtor community."⁴ In addition to these interpretations, Aberhart's political success can be viewed in terms of his personal activities

¹ Irving, p. 4.

² Schultz, pp. 1-68.

³ H. N. Moore, "What of Social Credit?" Part I. Maclean's Magazine. January 1, 1936, pp. 14-15. Hereafter cited H. N. Moore, "What of Social Credit?" Part I.

⁴ A. Brady, Democracy in the Dominions. (Toronto, 1952), p. 120.

in Alberta from 1910 to 1935. These activities carried him into several separate but related fields of endeavor. As a school principal, as a Bible scholar and teacher, and as a radio evangelist, Aberhart became well known to a large segment of Alberta's populace. Being acquainted with classroom problems and the debasing effect of the Depression upon young people, Aberhart was aware that changes were necessary if Alberta was to realize her potential in social and economic spheres.

William Aberhart came to Alberta in 1910 from his native province of Ontario. He began his trek west in 1908, moving to Brantford, Ontario, where he was principal of an elementary school. In September 1910 he took a position as teacher in Calgary at Alexandra Elementary School. The next year he transferred to the principalship of King Edward School and finally, in 1915, became the principal of Balmoral Heights. This school, with the addition of a new building, became Crescent Heights High School in 1927,⁵ and it was while in this position that William Aberhart first began to make his mark in Alberta.

As a high school principal Aberhart was highly successful. Two of his former pupils who also became teachers at Crescent Heights have stated some of the things which they felt contributed to this:

⁵ Schultz, pp. 14-15

His exceptional organizing ability contributed greatly to the efficiency of the school. Nowhere was this more evident than in the Crescent Heights Parent-Teacher Association, which had an active membership of over 200. Mr. Aberhart would send questionnaires to parents, 'Are you coming?' (Yes or No). Consequently, there were very few principals who got the support of parents like Mr. Aberhart. He was one of the most excellent teachers I have ever seen; he was interesting, thorough, and a master at reviews; there is not too much I can say except that he was excellent. His method of presentation was of such a nature that he presented material vividly to the students. Support of his teachers was also excellent.⁶

We never had any disciplinary problems when Mr. Aberhart was there. He demanded and got achievement and as a principal I liked him fine. If you had any problem you knew he would back you.⁷

Aberhart's concern for his pupils and teachers is also borne out by some of the reflections of his immediate family:

We always took our holidays in July because on August 1, father always had to be back at school. His teachers always said that right from the first day of school everyone knew exactly how many pupils would be in each class and what classes they would teach.⁸

Possibly one of the most accurate estimates of William Aberhart's abilities as a teacher is found in the report

⁶ Interview with Mabel Giles, Calgary, Alberta, December 19, 1969. Miss Giles was a student under Aberhart, (1914-1915) and one of his teachers, (1916-1935).

⁷ Interview with Avis Hibbard, Calgary, Alberta, May 17, 1970. Miss Hibbard was a student under Aberhart, (1924-1927) and one of his teachers, (1930-1935).

⁸ Interview with Ola MacNutt, Calgary, Alberta, December 16, 1969.

of an inspector of high schools, February 1935:

Mr. Aberhart possesses a forceful personality; his voice and manner are impressive. His mastery of the subject is far in advance of the requirements. Explanations are very clear, the careful and correct English, well-planned lessons and vivid blackboard illustration all contributing to effectiveness. Class interest, attention, response, and effort are of a very high order. Students are acquiring desirable habits in attacking problems systematically, in neat, accurate and business-like tabulation of results and in keeping their work up-to-date. Students' replies, even when imperfect, generally receive encouraging and patient treatment.⁹

Even after Aberhart's entry into politics his reputation as an educator remained excellent as even "his bitterest enemies will tell you that Aberhart was an exceedingly able teacher and a highly efficient principal."¹⁰

Before 1935 William Aberhart did not confine his activities to the principalship of Crescent Heights High School. As a firm believer in the Bible and as a practitioner of the fundamental Baptist faith, Aberhart played an active part in biblical study in the west. As early as 1918 he began teaching a Sunday school class at the Westbourne Baptist church in Calgary. When membership in this class reached the point of overcrowding, the congregation began meeting in the large theatres of the city.

1925 marked the beginning of another major activity

⁹ Ola MacNutt Papers in possession of Ola MacNutt, Calgary, Alberta. "Department of Education, Alberta, -- Report of Inspector of High Schools," Inspector H. E. Balfour, January 29 - February 5, 1935.

¹⁰ H. N. Moore, "What of Social Credit?" Part I, p. 15.

of Aberhart's life. During that year he began to broadcast his Bible messages over CFCN radio station. By the end of 1925 Aberhart had several hundred followers, "and soon his influence within the fundamentalist Westbourne congregation began to overshadow that of its minister."¹¹ Not only did Aberhart have considerable influence among those immediately associated with him but also amongst his vast radio following. During the winter of 1925-26 he organized a Radio Sunday School in which he sent out Bible study lessons to children free of charge. "In 1926, 474 had enrolled and each year the number increased until 1938-1939 when the peak enrolment of 9,141 was reached."¹²

In 1927 because of the tremendous response his broadcasts had received, Aberhart organized the Calgary Prophetic Bible Institute, and with funds largely obtained from appeals to his radio audience he built a \$65,000 building capable of seating 1,200 persons. This Institute not only became the nerve centre of all of Aberhart's broadcasting activities and Bible study course correspondence, but also a residential school for Bible studies.

The popularity of the radio broadcasts made the Institute very popular. Aberhart himself "received something of a sort of devotion generally accorded outstanding

¹¹ W. E. Mann, Sect, Cult, and Church in Alberta. (Toronto, 1955), p. 22.

¹² Schultz, p. 29.

radio crooners and comedians."¹³ The influence of the broadcasts was further enhanced by the fact that the mountains curtailed interference from British Columbia stations and sheer distance had a similar limiting effect on those in the eastern provinces. CFCN also had facilities for long-range broadcasting as it was "the only high-powered station in Alberta giving province-wide coverage."¹⁴ The vast audience to which Aberhart was able to speak is evident from the fact that during a broadcast in April 1935, he read several letters from "as far distant as Quebec, the maritimes, and Pennsylvania."¹⁵ At its peak in 1935 Aberhart's radio audience was computed at three hundred thousand (it is likely that not more than 65 per cent of the three hundred thousand were Albertans), while the Bible Institute listed one thousand two hundred and seventy-five supporters and the radio Sunday school with its printed lesson material reached eight thousand families.¹⁶ Such was the influence Aberhart wielded through his radio broadcasts and Institute in 1935.

¹³ Mann, p. 129.

¹⁴ H. Gordon Love, Manager CFCN, "Social Credit and the Radio," MacLean's Magazine. February 1, 1936, p. 34.

¹⁵ The Calgary Daily Herald, April 15, 1935.

¹⁶ Mann, p. 22.

The Prophetic Bible Institute was primarily a theological college with emphasis on Bible study.¹⁷ The program offered was a three-year course which ran from October to March. Students not only studied their own Bible course but also aided in preparing and marking the correspondence courses offered. The two major correspondence courses included -- "Rightly Dividing the Word or Systematic Theology" and "The Busy Peoples' Bible Course"-- the latter being an analysis of the books of the Bible. Upon completion of these courses a student could be admitted to the Institute for further study.¹⁸

Even in the role of radio evangelist and as head of a vast following through the Bible Institute, Aberhart remained a teacher. One study states:

In writing the textbooks for his students Aberhart, the Bible teacher, was essentially Aberhart, the school teacher. He wrote, as he spoke, as one having authority. The course books were didactic and elementary, yet effective and literate as he substantiated his argument by graphic historical examples. After repeating the major points in each chapter he would review the entire chapter at the end of the unit.¹⁹

Aberhart was also a good judge of talent. Thus when a

¹⁷ Interview with Ernest C. Manning, Edmonton, Alberta, May 25, 1970.

¹⁸ Interviews with Reverend William J. Laing and Pastor Cyril Hutchinson, Calgary, Alberta, May 16, 1970. Both attended the Institute in 1927-1928 and Hutchinson was secretary there from 1928 to 1935 when he succeeded Aberhart as its principal.

¹⁹ Schultz, pp. 34-35.

young man from Saskatchewan, Ernest Charles Manning, showed himself to be an excellent Bible scholar and writer, he was asked to be Aberhart's personal secretary. Several of the later graduates and volunteer workers of the Institute became members of its teaching staff.²⁰

As a high school principal and Bible teacher, Aberhart was in an excellent position to see the first-hand effects of the Depression on young people. Many of his most able students were forced to leave school because their parents were unable to continue to support them. Often those who did graduate failed to gain employment. Aberhart would meet his most brilliant graduates and upon inquiry would learn that they were not getting along too well. They had no jobs.²¹ Not surprisingly Aberhart felt that brains and talent were being totally wasted.²²

Conditions in rural Alberta were also in deep depression by 1932. The prosperous years of 1925-1930 had suddenly disappeared. Drought and grasshoppers had severely cut wheat production and prices. Many farmers had accumulated huge debts during the boom years as they purchased more acres and newer and more efficient farm equipment. The rigidities of public finance caused by

²⁰ Mabel Giles, December 19, 1969.

²¹ A. W. Cashman, Ernest C. Manning, (Edmonton, n.d.), p. 9.

²² Ola MacNutt, December 16, 1969.

"high interest rates and mounting indebtedness in areas characterized by a highly variable net income (that is, wheat), threw an ever-increasing strain upon . . . economic institutions."²³ Referring to some of the drastically low levels of existence in dry prairie areas, one 1935 member of the Alberta legislature states:

One would not think that flour sacks were of much use except as containers of flour. But in our land that was only their initial purpose. Afterwards they became window curtains, table cloths, pillow slips, and even dresses. During the worst years in the dust bowl, some of our neighbors were reduced to salting gophers in barrels, to be placed later on the family table as a special treat. Not very pretty, I admit--but true.²⁴

With the Depression apparently permanent, in June 1932 an event occurred which was profoundly to affect William Aberhart, the school master and Bible teacher. As the school year drew to its close, a Grade XII student at Crescent Heights committed suicide, owing to his family's wretched circumstances. Shaken to his depths by this tragic death of one of his favorite and best students, Aberhart went up to Edmonton early in July to mark matriculation examinations. "While there he engaged in long discussions concerning the problems of the depression and their possible solution with a friend and fellow examiner, Charles

²³ G. E. Britnell, "The Elliot-Walker Report: A Review," Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, Volume II, 1936, p. 532.

²⁴ N. B. James, "Palaces in the Dust Bowl," Alberta Golden Jubilee Anthology (Edmonton, 1955), pp. 127-128.

M. Scarborough."²⁵ Scarborough had been a student of Social Credit since 1925 and had attempted unsuccessfully to interest Aberhart in Social Credit on several previous occasions.²⁶ Possibly due to the severe conditions of the time as well as to the death of the student, Aberhart was suddenly far more receptive to the ideas of Scarborough and Social Credit. In late July, Scarborough convinced Aberhart that all of Alberta's economic distress could be relieved by utilizing the principles outlined in a Social Credit book, Unemployment or War by Maurice Colbourne. Scarborough loaned this book to Aberhart on a promise that he would read it. Almost overnight Aberhart became an advocate of Social Credit principles.

Upon returning to Calgary, Aberhart began to introduce some of the basic doctrines of Social Credit into his Sunday afternoon broadcasts. He also threw out challenging questions to his vast audience. "Why was there so much poverty in the midst of plenty?" "Was not the real root of Alberta's economic problems really centered on the shortage of purchasing power?" "Why couldn't Social Credit be a possible answer to the grim situation brought on by the depression?" Aberhart began to urge his audience "to decide for themselves after a careful study of Social Credit

²⁵ Irving, p. 47.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 48.

ideas"²⁷ if it was not a real solution to their problems. His appeals met with a great degree of acceptance. By 1933 William Aberhart, school principal and Bible teacher, was teaching Social Credit principles as expounded by its main theorist, Major C. H. Douglas. These classes were open to the public on week nights at the Prophetic Bible Institute. A weekly study group soon became totally engrossed in Social Credit principles. John A. Irving explains the procedure during these early months of the Social Credit movement:

After a deacon had registered the students, Aberhart informed them that he proposed to use class-room techniques for teaching them Social Credit. At the next meeting, a series of mimeographed lessons would be available for one dollar, which would be returned to those who attended the full course. Weekly, thereafter, throughout the remainder of the winter, the spring, and the early summer this group received the fundamental principles of the saving philosophy. As a good school-teacher Aberhart methodically, and somewhat ponderously, made ample use of the blackboard and chart to illustrate his points.²⁸

During this early period Aberhart continually emphasized that Social Credit was not political but rather educational, as it was a study of basic economic principles.

By the end of 1933 five study groups had been established in Calgary besides the original group at the Institute. Interest in Social Credit spread to other surrounding

²⁷ Ibid., p. 51

²⁸ Ibid., p. 52

areas and by the summer of 1933 Aberhart and Ernest C. Manning had accepted many invitations to speak on Social Credit in a number of rural centres throughout southern Alberta. By September such a large amount of interest had been generated by the speaking tours and Aberhart's Sunday broadcasts that he decided to organize more study groups. Members from the original Institute group largely organized these. "Study groups sprang up everywhere led by men and women versed in, or at least interested in, Social Credit economics. Aberhart and a handful of trained speakers provided the cohesion and incentive."²⁹ The organization of these groups followed United Farmers of Alberta tactics. Social Credit study groups were similar to these earlier groups and often were merely a continuation of them. Each of these groups were entirely autonomous and they made their own rules and had their own programs. Each had a president, a vice-president, and a secretary. Most of them got hold of one of Major Douglas' books and studied Social Credit from it.³⁰ As one study suggests concerning these groups:

They became the grass-roots source of the massive strength of the movement in Alberta. When popular enthusiasm for Social Credit was approaching the stage of mass hysteria, a few weeks before the election of 1935, there were sixty-three groups in

²⁹ Ibid., p. 88.

³⁰ Interviews with A. V. Bourcier and Floyd M. Baker, Edmonton, Alberta, April 29, 1970. Both were early members of study groups as well as Social Credit candidates in the election of 1935.

Calgary alone and some 1,600 in the whole province. In addition to their function as dynamic centres of the movement in almost every city block or rural district, the groups were also the principal medium through which funds were raised for the movement.³¹

Until the spring of 1934 Aberhart had constantly contended that the Social Credit study groups were not political. However, once the United Farmers of Alberta (U.F.A.) government of the province began to discuss the possibilities of Social Credit for Alberta and went so far as to have Aberhart appear before a committee with his plan for Social Credit in Alberta, politics could not be avoided.³² Major C. H. Douglas also appeared before the committee and though both Aberhart and Douglas proposed further study, the government's decision was to pursue the matter no further.

Aberhart was unimpressed and with Manning continued to hold meetings and to advocate the practice of Social Credit throughout the summer and fall of 1934. The Sunday broadcasts continued to promote what Aberhart and many others had come to regard as the saving doctrines of Social Credit. The response of the public became even stronger

³¹ J. A. Irving, "The Appeal of Social Credit." Queen's Quarterly, Summer 1953, p. 148. Hereafter cited J. A. Irving, "The Appeal of Social Credit."

³² Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton. Minister's Papers. "The Douglas System of Social Credit: Evidence taken by the Agricultural Committee of the Alberta Legislature, 1934." Hereafter cited PAA., Minister's Papers.

and by the fall of 1934 public pressure was once again placed upon the government.

At their annual convention in January 1935 the U.F.A. invited Aberhart to debate with their leaders as to the practicality of Social Credit for Alberta. This debate centered upon the poverty and distress of Alberta's residents and in the end no conclusion regarding the implementation of Social Credit was reached. However, the U.F.A. did propose a number of resolutions, one of which read as follows:

Whereas the present financial system has failed to meet the requirements of modern civilization: Therefore be it resolved that a system of Social Credit as outlined by Mr. William Aberhart of Calgary, be put as a plank in the U.F.A. platform to be brought before the electorate at the next provincial election.³³

When voted upon this resolution was badly beaten.

Public support of Social Credit and of Aberhart continued to mount. The U.F.A. in an attempt to divert some of this popularity announced on February 22, 1935 that Major Douglas would be coming to Alberta in May to advise the U.F.A. on a Social Credit plan for Alberta.³⁴ This caused dissent among many Aberhart followers who felt that Douglas' program was not superior to, only more experienced

³³ Irving, p. 118.

³⁴ The Calgary Daily Herald, February 22, 1935.

than, Aberhart's.³⁵ Aberhart's contact with the people as their teacher and friend, whether in personal association or through the magic of radio, caused the U.F.A. further concern. Shortly after announcing Douglas' coming the U.F.A. realized that William Aberhart was the real threat to their political security, and so they invited him to submit his Social Credit plan for Alberta.³⁶ Even though the Calgary Public School Board granted him leave of absence,³⁷ Aberhart approached the invitation with a great degree of caution. Accordingly, he asked Premier Reid, "What bearing or relationship would my services have upon the duties and requests given to Major Douglas?"³⁸ Other questions pertained to matters of time, statistics, and staff available. The Premier quickly reassured Aberhart that all would be placed at his disposal.³⁹ When Aberhart requested further details,⁴⁰ the delay mounted.

Public reaction to the government's invitation to Aberhart was definitely negative. It was felt that he had done his duty when he had appeared before the committee the

³⁵ Alberta Social Credit Chronicle, March 1, 1935.

³⁶ The Calgary Daily Herald, March 6, 1935.

³⁷ Ibid., March 7, 1935.

³⁸ PAA., Minister's Papers. Aberhart to Reid, March 14, 1935.

³⁹ Ibid., Reid to Aberhart, March 18, 1935.

⁴⁰ Ibid., Aberhart to Reid, March 21, 1935.

previous year. Thus in a Social Credit convention held at the Prophetic Bible Institute in early April 1935, these feelings were solidly expressed in the following resolution:

Whereas the present government has every opportunity of co-operating with Mr. Aberhart and bringing in a plan of social credit for Alberta; and whereas the action of the present government of inviting Mr. Aberhart to form a plan of social credit for Alberta at this strategic moment savors of manoeuvring for political advantage; and whereas, it is our firm belief that the earliest possible introduction of social credit to Alberta can best be assured with a social credit government in power, which is independent of political parties, therefore, be it resolved, that this convention strongly urges Mr. Aberhart to refrain from formulating any plan of social credit for the present government.⁴¹

As a result, on April 9, 1935 William Aberhart forwarded the following communication to Premier Reid:

I now find, Sir, that the question of preparing a plan for the present Government has been really taken out of my hands by the persistent demands of the Constituency Social Credit Conventions. They have impressed upon me the importance of being available for educational Work in Social Credit. They have also pointed out, that, as Major Douglas will be here shortly and he will have the final word, my work would be more or less of a duplication. I therefore feel obliged to inform you, that I must bow to this mandate of the people. Allow me to thank you for the courtesy and honor you have extended to me by this invitation, and also to say, I regret that the circumstances make it impossible for me to accept it.⁴²

When Major Douglas did finally arrive in Alberta, the U.F.A. and other Aberhart critics continued their attempts

⁴¹ Alberta Social Credit Chronicle, April 10, 1935, p. 1.

⁴² PAA., Minister's Papers. Aberhart to Reid, April 9, 1935.

to discredit the latter. The strategy of these critics was to cause friction between Aberhart and Douglas. However, this strategy only increased Aberhart's popularity. "Social Crediters were infuriated that the newspapers and the government should once again have tried to compromise the one man who could save Alberta. Their bitter resentment gave a new impetus to their cause."⁴³

The provincial election was set for August 22, 1935. William Aberhart continued vigorously to expound his version of Social Credit theory. As a theory which explained poverty in the midst of plenty and offered the possibility of twenty-five dollars per month as a basic dividend to all adults in the province, Social Credit support continued to be very strong. The impact of the radio constantly brought William Aberhart into the homes of most Albertans. By May 1935 "in addition to the Sunday broadcasts at church rates, Aberhart bought from CFCN regular week-day time for political broadcasts at a dollar a minute."⁴⁴ His aforementioned popularity as a radio speaker was well established before the election campaign of 1935. However, a contemporary account gives one of the reasons why Aberhart was able to campaign so successfully through the use of this media:

⁴³ Irving, p. 180.

⁴⁴ Schultz, p. 122.

Social Credit was perfectly adapted to the technique of the radio. William Aberhart made a popular version of Social Credit air-worthy in Alberta, just as in his Prophetic Bible Institute he had made a popular version of Christianity airworthy. In both cases he used doctrine which had already acquired a certain prestige. His radio audience resembled a religious congregation. Its Sunday services held its members together. They convinced one another. They shunned all opposition. No critics had access to their attention.⁴⁵

Aberhart also used dramatized "plays" over the radio to argue the merits of Social Credit. The most spectacular of these was "The Man from Mars" series in which a cultured Englishman impersonated a Martian visitor to the earth and, in a strange accent, expressed endless surprise that earthmen should tolerate such conditions as existed in Alberta in 1935.⁴⁶

One of the chief criticisms levelled at Aberhart during the election campaign involved his comingling of religion and politics. Charles Ernst, member of Parliament from Nova Scotia, on a tour of western Canada, declared that Aberhart came with the Douglas system in one hand and the Holy Ghost in the other. "If the scriptures

⁴⁵ H. F. Angus, "The Portent of Social Credit in Alberta," Pacific Affairs. Volume IX, September 1936, p. 287. Hereafter cited H. F. Angus, "The Portent of Social Credit in Alberta."

⁴⁶ J. A. Irving, "Psychological Aspects of the Social Credit Movement in Alberta." Canadian Journal of Psychology. Volume I, 1947, p. 139. Hereafter cited J. A. Irving, "Psychological Aspects of the Social Credit Movement in Alberta."

were separated from the social credit movement here, it would not be hard to beat," he said.⁴⁷ To such criticism many offered what they viewed as a logical reply. "As to Mr. Aberhart's talks being flavored with religion--is it not inevitable considering his background. It would be surprising if it were otherwise."⁴⁸ Aberhart also had a potent answer to such criticism: "Wouldn't we all be better off if we had more religion in our politics?"⁴⁹

In 1935 Alberta had sixty-three constituencies, ten of which were in Edmonton and Calgary alone. As one 1935 Social Credit candidate later remarked, "It had been decided that if we were going into this thing at all, we'd better do it right, and would have a candidate in every constituency."⁵⁰ This was to be the case and sixty-three carefully picked candidates were selected by the local constituencies and the Social Credit Board, composed of Aberhart and six close associates of the movement. Aberhart had "identified with the common people";⁵¹ his candidates for the election were no different. One states:

What small success I attained was, I think, due

⁴⁷ The Calgary Daily Herald, April 29, 1935.

⁴⁸ The Edmonton Journal, April 8, 1935.

⁴⁹ W. A. Irvin, "Crisis in Alberta," Maclean's Magazine. December 1, 1937, p. 48.

⁵⁰ James, p. 171.

⁵¹ Interview with Orvis Kennedy, Edmonton, Alberta, September 30, 1969.

to the fact that I was just an ordinary person, and so knew what other ordinary people were thinking. Being just ordinary I naturally used ordinary language, and so was able to put into words what my audience had been thinking for some time--perhaps without knowing it.⁵²

Another candidate, a school teacher, stated that the local school board closed his school at 10:00 A.M. to enable him to attend an important election rally.⁵³ While the candidates came from all walks of life, the majority were farmers and teachers.

The conditions of the Depression had furthered the cause of Aberhart and his followers. To a rally in Edmonton Aberhart stated, "There are undernourished, underfed children by the thousands in this province; there are well-educated, capable women who are miserably clad, some using gunny sacks with which to make clothes."⁵⁴ Six months later in a speech in his hometown of Seaforth, Ontario, Aberhart also reported, "There are children in Alberta who have not tasted butter or milk in the last three years even though they live on farms."⁵⁵ Opponents of Social Credit and Aberhart were indignant. To them, "At most he exaggerated conditions which needed no exaggeration to be shock-

⁵² James, p. 160.

⁵³ A. V. Bourcier, April 29, 1970.

⁵⁴ The Edmonton Bulletin, December 27, 1934.

⁵⁵ PAA., Minister's Papers. "Seaforth Speech." Summer, 1935.

ing."⁵⁶ During the election Aberhart constantly asked, "Why is there so much poverty in the midst of plenty?" Major Douglas in later analysing the success of Social Credit in 1935 echoed this theme:

It was at no time Mr. Aberhart's economics which brought him to power, but rather his vivid presentation of the general lunacy responsible for the grinding poverty so common in a Province of abounding riches.⁵⁷

Somewhat ironically Aberhart and his colleagues were also aided by the opposition parties. As one authority states:

When a distinctly new movement or party gains such strength in a province as to threaten the dominance of the two major parties, as did Mr. Aberhart's Social Credit party in Alberta in 1935, there is a general tendency for the two older parties to coalesce locally against the new-comer.⁵⁸

This proved to be the case and while the opposition may have received a slightly different emphasis, "all parties were opposing Social Credit."⁵⁹ However, no alternative program could generate the support William Aberhart and his colleagues enjoyed. One U.F.A. candidate in the 1935 elec-

⁵⁶ Jean Burnet, Next-Year Country, (Toronto, 1951), p. 20.

⁵⁷ Major C. H. Douglas, The Alberta Experiment, (London, 1937), pp. 22-23.

⁵⁸ H. McD. Clokie, Canadian Government and Politics, (Toronto, 1944), p. 211.

⁵⁹ The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs, 1935 and 1936, (Toronto, 1939), p. 351. Hereafter cited The Canadian Annual Review, 1935 and 1936.

tion explained the futility he felt during the campaign:

Our leaders both in government and in financial circles had given up. The only possible bright spot was that the economy had always righted itself before. There was no use talking against Social Credit; it was like talking against the weather. I just gave up. The new party gave rise to new hope and people were willing to believe anything that gave them hope. Most of what we did in 1935 was to defend our position and our policies.⁶⁰

The U.F.A. government also increased the mounting support for Social Credit because it was suffering a loss of public confidence. It had been in office fourteen years. Prestige was also lost "through the resignation of the premier, Mr. J. E. Brownlee, following his involvement in a seduction case and through the divorce litigation involving the Minister of Public Works, Mr. O. L. McPherson, who had not been re-appointed to the Cabinet when the Hon. R. G. Reid became Prime Minister in 1934."⁶¹ As a former member stated, "Reid did not have the influence Brownlee had held."⁶² The U.F.A. had also lost much of its popular support with the retirement of Henry Wise Wood, who had been one of its dominant figures from the beginning.⁶³

⁶⁰ Interview with Isidore Goresky, Edmonton, Alberta, May 6, 1970.

⁶¹ The Canadian Annual Review 1935 and 1936, pp. 335-336.

⁶² Isidore Goresky, May 6, 1970.

⁶³ W. K. Rolph, Henry Wise Wood of Alberta, (Toronto, 1950), p. 25.

The U.F.A. had also unknowingly prepared Alberta for the acceptance of Social Credit. By bringing Major Douglas before the Alberta legislature they helped popularize his theory.⁶⁴ As one authority later stated, "The earlier agitation for credit reform by J. W. Leedy, George Bevington, Henry Spencer, William Irvin and others in the U.F.A. made the transition from co-operative credit to social credit an easy one for Alberta farmers. The basic doctrine that credit controls should rest with the state was well accepted among the U.F.A. members long before Social Credit began its agitation. The Social Crediters were reaping where others had sown."⁶⁵ Douglas' books and pamphlets were also "favourably and extensively published by the U.F.A. from its beginning in 1921, and the U.F.A. office carried a stock of them all through the 1920's and early 1930's."⁶⁶ One U.F.A. local reported, "We got some of our earliest pamphlets on Social Credit from the U.F.A. office in Calgary."⁶⁷ The U.F.A. had also served as a model in another respect. A people who

⁶⁴ Isidore Goresky, May 6, 1970.

⁶⁵ P. F. Sharp, The Agrarian Revolt, (Minneapolis, 1948), p. 190.

⁶⁶ C. B. MacPherson, Democracy in Alberta, (Toronto, 1953), p. 144.

⁶⁷ J. A. Irving, "Psychological Aspects of the Social Credit Movement in Alberta," p. 78.

had seen the U.F.A. sweep into office after only a year or two of political organization were not intimidated by the difficulties of building a new organization for the purpose of capturing political power.⁶⁸

When election day arrived on August 22, 1935 Aberhart and his candidates and supporters were amply rewarded. As one successful candidate stated, "It was perhaps the most complete victory that any political party . . . had ever accomplished."⁶⁹ Even the most optimistic candidates had hoped, at best, that Social Credit would capture enough seats to "form His Majesty's Loyal Opposition."⁷⁰

Despite the surprise and unpreparedness of Social Credit in the face of victory, new cabinet ministers were designated with little hesitancy. Aberhart as mentioned, became Minister of Education. Opinion as to his attitude towards this position is divided. A close teaching colleague states, "He did not plan on being the Minister but public pressure really put him into this position."⁷¹ A political contemporary states that "all of us closely associated with Mr. Aberhart never had any other thought than that he would assume that portfolio himself. This

⁶⁸ MacPherson, pp. 148-149.

⁶⁹ James, p. 196.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 198.

⁷¹ Mabel Giles, December 19, 1969.

position was a natural thing considering that he had spent his whole life in education."⁷²

William Aberhart's pre-election activities had certainly centred upon education. As a school principal and Bible scholar his life had centred on teaching. His activities in preaching both biblical and Social Credit doctrines had utilized educational approaches. The superb organization of Social Credit study groups had also given Aberhart avenues for his particular brand of economics. That he was able to inspire confidence in the Social Credit theory was undoubtedly attributable to his abilities as a teacher and preacher. All of these experiences prepared him for the position of Minister of Education.

Education had received only secondary emphasis in the Social Credit Campaign in 1935. Two participating candidates reported:

The 1935 campaign was centred on the scarcity of money. You could relate all the problems of the depression to the shortage of cash. Even the sad condition of the schools and of education boiled down to the shortage of money.⁷³

It wasn't an issue singled out other than because Mr. Aberhart's whole life was spent in education and he was recognized as an educator primarily. He, because of his great interest in education and in young people, put a great deal of emphasis on the importance of develop-

⁷² Ernest C. Manning, May 25, 1970.

⁷³ A. V. Bourcier, April 29, 1970.

ing the educational system of the province, but it wasn't a public issue in any particular sense.⁷⁴

A U.F.A. candidate also stated that "education wasn't much of an election issue in 1935, as people had more immediate concerns."⁷⁵

The idea of the basic dividend of twenty-five dollars per month however, did have some educational significance. When asked by his immediate family why twenty-five dollars was the figure chosen, Aberhart replied, "That was the figure I picked out. That was the going rate for board and room at the time and I felt that if a young man had this, he could go on with his education."⁷⁶

The 1935 Social Credit platform did devote one plank in a ten-plank platform to education. It stated:

.4 The problem of Education. (An Eighteenth Century System can never handle a Twentieth Century Problem).

- (a) Our schools should at once be made to supply the training the New Social Order demands. Up to the present the University requirements for an Academic preparation has pre-dominated (sic) our Educational System. Only a small percentage of our students ever enter University.
- (b) Further attempts should be made to bring the various Provincial Educational Systems into greater harmony.
- (c) The Basic Monthly Dividends will at once remove

⁷⁴ Ernest C. Manning, May 25, 1970.

⁷⁵ Isidore Goresky, May 6, 1970.

⁷⁶ Ola MacNutt, December 16, 1969.

the hindrances to any student proceeding along any line of instruction that appeals to him.⁷⁷

Like most election planks, however, no guaranteed action was promised even if Social Credit was elected. Thus one of the successful candidates stated in reflection, "We have the radio now to explain to us 'the Party Platform'--with interchangeable planks. Each plank gets its share of eulogy or abuse. When the election is over the platform is taken down and the planks are carefully stowed away for another four years or so."⁷⁸

This, however, was not totally the case in regards to education in the province. Although the anticipated basic monthly dividends never arrived, many educational changes were to be forth-coming under the new ministry of William Aberhart. The major changes included the establishment of large school divisions, a new curriculum for Alberta schools and teachers' professionalization.

Shortly after the election, those concerned with Alberta's education began to anticipate what changes might be forth-coming. Editorially, the A.T.A. Magazine stated:

Ten members of the legislature are teachers as against three lawyers. Throughout the ages lawyers, artists, soldiers, philosophers, etc., have had their day. Now it is the

⁷⁷ Alberta Social Credit Platform, The Calgary Daily Herald, April 6, 1935, p. 1.

⁷⁸ James, p. 73.

teachers' turn.⁷⁹

The new Minister also received the following which expressed the feelings of many:

As this is our first official communication since your election will you permit us to extend our congratulations; we feel that with your long experience in the school room you will fill the office of Minister of Education in a manner that will not only solve many of the problems of School Management but will greatly benefit the whole educational system of our fair Province.⁸⁰

Aberhart with his political fortunes secured soon began to act in his office as Minister of Education. And under him the Department was not timid.

⁷⁹ A.T.A. Magazine, November 1935, p. 15

⁸⁰ PAA., Minister's Papers. Crow's Nest Pass Trustees' Association to Aberhart, December 4, 1935.

CHAPTER III

THE LARGE UNIT OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

Although William Aberhart had spent twenty-five years as a teacher and school administrator in Alberta, he was still unable to visualize the whole educational situation in the province. However, he was not one to hesitate. Upon becoming Minister of Education he immediately sought counsel from those who were more experienced in this area. The Acting Deputy Minister of Education, Dr. G. Fred McNally, was requested to tell the new Minister what, in his opinion, most needed doing to improve education in the province. Dr. McNally provided the following response: "First a re-organization of the rural school districts into large units of administration. Second, more money for teachers' salaries and some formula for the distribution of grants that would result in equalization of opportunity. Third, some plan to bring all teacher education under the jurisdiction of the university and so increase the prestige of the teaching profession."¹

The first of Dr. McNally's recommendations was quite familiar to anyone who had followed the activities of the former U.F.A. Minister of Education, Perren Baker. He had

¹ Coutts and Walker, p. 70.

struggled for several years to have the larger units of administration put into operation.² Baker headed a committee of ten members of the Legislature in 1934 calling upon individuals and all organizations interested in education to submit briefs on educational problems and finance. Upon the basis of the submissions received, this committee made several recommendations. The point of interest is that most of the recommendations were contingent upon the establishment of large administrative areas.³ Even though the U.F.A. government enjoyed a substantial majority, divergences of opinion over the recommendations were too great to overcome. Hence no action was initiated by the government regarding them.

Two large units of administration had been organized by Baker on an experimental basis, however. These units were Berry Creek and Turner Valley and each represented a unique situation warranting experimentation. The Berry Creek unit had been undertaken in the depopulated dust-bowl area in the Hanna inspectorate. In one year's operation economies of thirteen thousand dollars had been realized as well as "liquidation of older debts."⁴ The other unit of Turner Valley had been established because of the tremendous

² Wilson, pp. 79-96.

³ Goresky, p. 148.

⁴ Ibid., p. 149.

rise in population due to the oil boom in that area. Satisfaction had been expressed concerning its operation as well, since it had obviously been able to solve most of the major problems of educational administration in this area. Aberhart thus had some examples to follow.

An inspector of schools in the large experimental unit of Pouce Coupe, British Columbia, William Plenderleith, offered his services to Aberhart in an advisory capacity to establish the large units in Alberta.⁵ Though declined, this offer was indicative of the wide range of interest being shown in the proposal of the large units. Aberhart also received editorial support for establishing the large units of school administration in the pages of a widely circulated national magazine.⁶

Before Aberhart was able to proceed with actual legislation establishing the large units he and his Department had to face the public. In this regard a close colleague of the Minister stated that "the whole issue of the larger units was a big selling job."⁷ The question Aberhart put before the public was, "Why should rural students be denied educational opportunity because of circumstance?" Another colleague very closely associated with

⁵ PAA., Minister's Papers. Plenderleith to Aberhart, January 6, 1936.

⁶ H. N. Moore, "What of Social Credit?" Part I, pp. 14-15.

⁷ Orvis Kennedy, September 30, 1969.

the new Minister and the problem of "the big selling job" commented:

Mr. Aberhart was convinced as were many others, that you simply could not provide the children in the small one room schools the educational opportunity that was possible in a larger unit. For instance you simply could not duplicate libraries, laboratories, et cetera. He was a strong advocate right from the beginning of combining these small units into units large enough that there could be a centralized or a number of larger schools that could give to the people of the towns, villages and rural areas something more comparable to what was available in the large urban centres.⁸

However, Aberhart was not prepared to establish the larger units without pointing out the more apparent weaknesses of the existing system. A pamphlet entitled What Is and What Might Be in Rural Education in Alberta was published under his authority in 1935. The introductory paragraph stated unconditionally what the position of the new Ministry was:

For the past thirty years the Province of Alberta has been operating a system of school administration inherited from the old Territorial regime. From time to time improvements have been made in this system, but its main features remain as they were in 1905. It has accordingly become very clear to those who are charged with the responsibility of administering Alberta's Schools that if these schools are to continue to serve the purpose for which they were established, to say nothing of further progress, a new chapter in Alberta's educational history must now be written.⁹

In pointing directly to the weaknesses of the existing

⁸ Ernest C. Manning, May 25, 1970.

⁹ Alberta Government, Department of Education, What Is and What Might be in Rural Education in Alberta (1935), p. 3.

system and the benefits of the larger units Aberhart followed very closely the ideas of his predecessor.¹⁰

Despite the theoretical advantages of better educational services to the public, opposition to the larger units of administration was widespread. Aberhart though aware of such opposition nevertheless pressed forward with plans to establish the larger units. Among those most vehemently opposed were the rural trustees who stood to lose their positions of authority, income, and prestige in their small local communities. In a speech to the Association of Municipal Districts in December 1935 Aberhart urged members to find ways of cutting costs and he stated flatly that Alberta had no need for "10,000 school trustees, 3,000 school secretaries and 3,000 audits."¹¹ That many of the trustees were genuinely concerned with the loss of local autonomy is a fact that cannot be denied. However, a second consideration was directly related to their own personal finances. The School Act of 1931 provided for the payment of the following allowances to divisional trustees:

- (1) The sum of not more than five dollars per day for each day spent in attendance at a divisional board meeting together with an allowance of not more than eight cents per mile necessarily travelled in coming to and returning from meetings

¹⁰ Goresky, p. 150.

¹¹ H. N. Moore "What of Social Credit?" Part II Maclean's Magazine. January 15, 1936. p. 15. Hereafter cited H. N. Moore "What of Social Credit?" Part II.

of the board.

- (2) Reasonable allowances for travelling expenses and subsistence when engaged away from home on business of the board authorized by resolution of the board.

These trustees as well as the three thousand secretary-treasurers of school boards saw no reason to forfeit their salaries in such "hard times."¹²

Aberhart made his position clear to the trustees right from the start. In addressing the Rural Trustees' Association convention in Calgary, February 4, 1936 the Minister stated that "the purpose of the new system which would combine present small school districts into large divisions of from 60 to 65 districts, sought to provide a better uniform educational opportunity for the children of the province."¹³ In further defending his stand Aberhart added:

The progress of education in this province has been retarded. It is not so progressive as other things we have here in Alberta . . . The schools of this province all point in one direction but only a few of our graduates ever go in that direction -- into the professions. . . The number of closed schools in Alberta are increasing. In 1933 there were 3,734 school districts and 3,451 schools in operation, leaving 283 districts with no schools. In 1934 there were 3,766 school districts but with only 3,428 schools in operation.¹⁴

Despite apparent failings in the present system the trustees

¹² Schultz, p. 186.

¹³ The Albertan, February 5, 1936.

¹⁴ Ibid.

still remained adamant in their opposition. To them the new Ministry was acting too hastily. To Aberhart on the other hand, they were too hesitant. Thus when a trustee asked him, "Couldn't we postpone this thing for a year instead of rushing it?" he quickly replied, "We're not rushing it. You've been talking it for five years and you don't seem to be getting any closer to it."¹⁵ Two days after this occurrence the Trustees' Association accepted certain clauses of a report submitted by Professor A. E. Ottewell on behalf of its committee on rural education. In the form of instructions these clauses were as follows:

- (1) That in the event of legislation being introduced to set up the larger unit plan, the executive be instructed to keep in close touch and to the utmost degree possible, guard against the introduction of any hastily considered or premature plan and the sacrifice of local autonomy.
- (2) In the event of legislation being passed to establish the large units the government be asked to defer proclamation for one year to permit examination and criticism of the act before it is put into operation.¹⁶

On February 22 the Trustees' Association sent a copy of Resolution Number 1¹⁷ to all secretaries of rural school boards throughout the province opposing the large units of administration with the instructions, "Use the resolutions

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ The Calgary Daily Herald, February 7, 1936.

¹⁷ See Appendix A for a copy of this resolution.

enclosed or make others to suit your ideas, adding such arguments as you think wise. Delay is dangerous -- so act at once."¹⁸

The new Ministry did have one ally in response to the Trustees' Association and this was the Alberta Teachers' Association. In response to the resolutions of the former, the A.T.A. stated editorially:

Time will show, but we do not believe any large section of the members of the present Legislature will prove themselves so stupid as to believe that the people of the Province of Alberta are behind these underhand tactics of the Trustees' Association, or that they are so timid as to shrink from doing their honest duty in matters of this kind merely because an inner ring controlling the Trustees' Association have once again whispered "sic' em!" in the ear of the uproaring, reactionary gang to be found amongst Alberta school trustees.¹⁹

The A.T.A. was undoubtedly pleased by the reply of the member for Whitford, Mr. William Tomin, who declared "that he could not see how six hundred and fifty trustees in convention could dictate to the provincial government with the majority of the people behind them."²⁰

Aberhart was prepared to offer one small consolation to the trustees. One of their most incessant demands was that a plebiscite be taken in every local district proposed to be part of a large unit. The most Mr. Aberhart would

¹⁸ PAA., Ministers Papers, Form letter to all secretaries of school boards from the Alberta Trustees' Association, February 22, 1936.

¹⁹ A.T.A. Magazine, March, 1936. pp. 1-2.

²⁰ Goresky, p. 151.

promise was a review and a plebiscite after five years of operation in a large unit.²¹

That the new Ministry under William Aberhart was able to go forward in spite of such vigorous opposition from a group as powerful as the trustees has been the subject of some controversy. Some see Aberhart as being courageous. A former Member of the Legislature states:

Mr. Aberhart had courage to go ahead with the large unit. If he had been a politician he never would have gone ahead with it. However, he was a crusader and he often said, "We must do what is right no matter how it affects us politically." The large unit was right and that's why he went ahead with it.²²

Despite such glowing reports, the major reason the Minister was able to ignore the powerful trustees was closely related to the politics of the period. A U.F.A. Member from 1930 to 1935 pinpoints this fact:

The rural trustees had become part of the rural power structure -- the rural establishment. They had allied closely to the U.F.A. when they were in power and they supported the U.F.A. in the election of 1935. Thus when the Social Credit government wanted to go ahead with educational changes it was very easy to ignore the protests of those who had been their enemies - politically speaking.²³

This feeling was further expressed in a letter to the Minister from a school trustee from Etzikom who reported on a meeting of delegates from school districts of the Foremost School

²¹ Coutts and Walker, p. 74.

²² Floyd M. Baker, April 29, 1970.

²³ Isidore Goresky, May 6, 1970.

Division. Referring to the opposition proposal brought up at this meeting he stated:

I feel that the general feeling is still in favor of the enlarged districts but most of the delegates were prejudiced for fear they would lose a petty job and those in charge were not capable of explaining or didn't want to.

For these reasons I sincerely hope for the good of all that you force this project over these men who are trying to beat our cause.

I know the trouble makers personally and all are secretaries or official trustees as well as old-line party men.²⁴

Although opposition continued to be expressed, the proposed legislation for establishing the large units of administration did have some very positive support. The Alberta Teachers' Association was particularly active in their support. This Association had advocated establishing the large units previous to 1935 and had become impatient with the former U.F.A. government with its apparent unwillingness to pass the necessary legislation. This feeling had been conveyed shortly after the Social Credit victory by the A.T.A.

It would be hypocrisy to infer otherwise than that the teachers of Alberta have longed for a change of - shall we say "weather"; that long ago they arrived at the conviction that, generally speaking, the personnel of the last Legislature lacked sound vision in education and were without sound leadership and forceful direction, or alternately, that the general following of the various party leaders were incapable of viewing our school system otherwise than as a first-class vote-catching device.²⁵

²⁴ PAA., Minister's Papers. McFall to Aberhart, November 12, 1936.

²⁵ A.T.A. Magazine, September 1935, p. 1.

Concerning the larger unit "it would be fair to say that among the educators of that time the concept was almost unanimously accepted."²⁶

Support for the large unit, however, was not limited to professional educators. As early as January 1936 the following resolution was forwarded to the Minister from the Bonnyville area:

Moved by Mr. Lucien Seguin, seconded by Mr. Orphila Marcoux that the Duclos Social Credit Group go down on record as being in favor of Hon. Aberhart's New School Plan for Larger Units of Administration and that the government be advised of this stand.²⁷

Many other resolutions of support were also received by the Minister.²⁸

Although opposition and support for the larger units of administration were divided, the Minister of Education proceeded. On April 3, 1936 one of the acts formally assented to was "An Act to amend the School Act, 1931."²⁹ This amendment to the older legislation of the U.F.A. government made possible the proposal for the large units of school administration by ruling out option clauses. Section 231, Part I of the amendment of the School Act, 1931,

²⁶ Ernest C. Manning, May 25, 1970.

²⁷ PAA., Minister's Papers. Duclos Social Credit Group to Aberhart, January 27, 1936.

²⁸ See Appendix B for a listing of letters, petitions and resolutions received by the Minister in support of the large unit.

²⁹ Statutes of Alberta, 1936, 1 Edward VIII, c. 85, ss. 1-19. Hereafter cited Statutes of Alberta, 1936.

read as follows:

Where the conditions prevailing are such that it appears advisable in the interests of education so to do, or if it is so requested by the boards of trustees of the majority of the school districts in a proposed division, the Minister may by order constitute a school division consisting of any number of rural public school districts not being districts wholly or partially included in a consolidated district.³⁰

By the clause "where conditions prevailing are such that it appears advisable in the interests of education so to do," power was allocated to the Minister to establish the large units of school administration. The amended act still provided for the continued existence of the local boards within the larger division although these boards were relieved of responsibilities of finance and engagement and dismissal of teachers. "In general, these local boards acted as official links between their districts and the divisional board. These also could be delegated authority of school upkeep and nomination of teachers by the divisional board."³¹ The larger units or divisions as they were called were to be administered by the aforementioned divisional board composed of duly elected members from each of the older districts composing the large division. This new legislation provided for the appointment by the Minister of a superintendent of schools for each large

³⁰ Ibid., p. 269.

³¹ Gilles, p. 3.

division,³² the consolidation of the liabilities and assets of the smaller school districts with each being duly recorded,³³ as well as the equalization of the school tax across the whole larger division.³⁴ Consolidation of rural divisions and towns, villages, separate or other consolidated districts was also made possible.³⁵ The provisions made for minority rights, which had been one of the sources of discontent in some quarters, were also well provided for. If the board of a Protestant or Roman Catholic district in a division felt that the divisional board was not making adequate provision for the religious instruction of the children of that district, it could petition the Minister for the exclusion of that district from the division. The division, however, was also protected from vacillation by these districts because "if after complying with certain statutory conditions, the district succeeds in having itself taken out of the division, it cannot at any future date be included in a division without a favorable vote of the electors first having been obtained."³⁶

Organizing the large divisions was a colossal task.

³² Statutes of Alberta, 1936, c. 85, s.16.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Gilles, p. 8.

³⁵ Supra, p. 53 n.32.

³⁶ Gilles, p. 10.

By the fall of 1936 eleven large divisions were organized. In the months immediately preceding their establishment, the inspector of schools of the area, generally with the aid of other officials of the Department of Education, held public meetings in all local districts of the proposed larger division. "At these meetings the officials outlined the proposals with regard to setting up the division in question, dealt with the advantages of the scheme, and attempted to answer questions. In this way the electors were given the opportunity of securing definite information in regard to the manner in which the new system would affect them and their districts."³⁷ One of the major problems was that it was impossible to permit every local district to choose which large division it would join. A certain amount of uniformity had to be maintained since a superintendent could only supervise a certain limited number of classrooms with any degree of proficiency. However, in fixing the boundaries of the various large divisions "care was taken to include in each division schools that were geographically related to one another. Natural boundaries were taken into consideration as well as the positions of main highways and roads, and railway lines."³⁸

Of the eleven large divisions that operated the first year not all experienced difficulty either in organization

³⁷ Ibid., p. 1.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 2.

or administration. A Social Credit candidate in 1935 states concerning the formation of a large division in the Lac St. Anne area, where he had previously taught for several years:

I held meetings in all the large centres of the area and I took a straw-vote at these on the large unit. Ninety-five per cent of the vote was favorable. We set up the large unit and we had no trouble in the aftermath.³⁹

Some minor problems occurred in some divisions with location of schools. One ratepayer lived only two miles from a school but owned land and was living and being taxed in a division where the nearest school was four miles away.⁴⁰

In this case the Minister allowed an annual fee "of \$10" to be transferred to the closer school and the ratepayer's children attended there. Another unusual case in respect to location involved a ratepayer who lived on the exact corner of four districts. The solution to his problem was much the same as the previous case. A letter to him from the Deputy Minister stated:

If you can be better served by a school in one of the other districts then the Department will be quite prepared to transfer your land to that district.⁴¹

Although small problems were constantly being faced,

³⁹ A. V. Bourcier, April 29, 1970.

⁴⁰ PAA., Minister's Papers. Helling to Aberhart, February 24, 1937.

⁴¹ Ibid., Deputy Minister to Nemetz, March 4, 1937.

the first year of operation of the large units was most encouraging. Under the authority of the Minister of Education a special publication was printed outlining the major advantages of the larger units.⁴² Economic gains were made everywhere despite the slightly higher teachers' salaries being paid. The total saving over all eleven divisions amounted to slightly over \$51,000.⁴³ Under these divisions no teachers' salaries were kept in arrears and many of the older arrears were being paid off. Cost per pupil per day in the large divisions was also decreased by a substantial amount. In all schools of the province this cost was thirty-six dollars and sixty-five cents per pupil per day under the old system, whereas one year of operation of the large divisions showed this cost dropping to twenty-eight dollars and thirty cents.⁴⁴ This saving resulted partly from more efficient purchasing and distribution of supplies. Under the large units a substantial program of school repairs was also carried out.

In the large units it was also found that teacher placements were more efficient and teachers were posted from one school to another with a minimal amount of friction. Even

⁴² Alberta Government, Department of Education, School Divisions in Alberta: One Year's Experience. (1938).

⁴³ Alberta Government, Department of Education, Modernized Education. (1937), p. 2.

⁴⁴ Alberta Government, Social Credit Board, The Record Tells the Story. (1939), p. 22.

when it was found necessary to dismiss teachers there was very little trouble. "Most noticeable was the fact that out of sixty cases before the Board of Reference not one case was from a larger unit."⁴⁵ In addition to these aspects of the large division many schools were able to embark upon programs of health supervision, library service, and other services which had of necessity been neglected under the small district.

With such positive results there appeared little reason for not proceeding with the establishment of more large divisions. However, the public was not quite as willing to accept the large divisions as were the Minister and his Department. Indeed throughout the establishment of the large units, letters, petitions and resolutions came to the Minister's desk from all corners of the province.⁴⁶ The major reasons for the public opposition to the large units are typified in the following resolution received by the Minister in July 1937:

Whereas the proposed larger unit in this inspectorate is to be put in without a referendum of the people contrary to democratic principles, and whereas there is settled opinion that the direct taxation will be increased under the large unit, therefore be it resolved that this district go

⁴⁵ Goresky, p. 151.

⁴⁶ See Appendix C for listing of letters, petitions, and resolutions opposing the large units of school administration.

on record as opposed to being part of the same.⁴⁷

While the protests from the public against the large units were similar and somewhat stereo-typed, no less so were the Minister's replies to them. In nearly all instances he retorted:

It would seem to me that you have misunderstood the whole matter, or you never would have made such a protest.⁴⁸

To accusations of increased costs with the larger divisions the Minister had the experience of the first year. However, to those areas where the actual mill rate had increased he offered some other reassurance:

My opinion is that the cost under the system of the larger units will not be greater than under the smaller units. If there is any increase whatever it will be on account of the superior quality of the training that will be provided.⁴⁹

By October 1937 the financial reports for all the large divisions were completed and the Minister must have been most satisfied. In a radio broadcast given by him in that month entitled "Progress in Education," he was able to state concerning the costs of the larger units:

There has been no instance of the imposition of a higher mill rate over the Division than the average

⁴⁷ PAA., Minister's Papers. Farrow School District to Aberhart, July 8, 1937.

⁴⁸ Ibid., Aberhart to Safronovich, July 26, 1937.

⁴⁹ Ibid., Aberhart to McCracken, July 26, 1937.

mill rate of all the districts combined.⁵⁰

There was also another major justification of the implementation of the large units and this was in reference to the new enterprise curriculum. Thus in response to some complaints the Minister replied, "We are positive that the new curriculum cannot be satisfactorily handled under the small school management without aid from the larger divisions."⁵¹ The new curriculum and the large units were to benefit the child and Aberhart also stated this fact in another reply. "I would therefore consider that any body of people deciding that a larger unit is impractical should bear in mind that the interests of the children are at stake."⁵² With these views in mind the Minister and his Department proceeded with establishing more large units. Hence between September 1937 and September 1942 an additional thirty-nine divisions were organized bringing the total to fifty. As one study stated in 1942, "The organization of school districts into divisions is now complete and at the present time in the Province there are only 97 rural school districts not included in divisions."⁵³ These fifty divisions were composed of 3,342 smaller school

⁵⁰ Ibid., Radio Address, "Progress in Education." October 1937.

⁵¹ Ibid., Aberhart to Morrison, July 14, 1937.

⁵² Ibid., Aberhart to MacGowan, August 5, 1937.

⁵³ Gilles, p. 11.

districts. "The number of school district units per division varied from as low as 27 to as high as 119, the median being 72."⁵⁴

A perennial problem facing the Minister concerned the location of schools in the large units. Under the rural school districts many residents had located as close to the school as possible. With the large unit many students had to travel much further than previously. In response to complaints of particular locations for the large divisional school the Minister often stated, "As you know any location will in most rural districts, leave some children from two to three miles from the school and this site seems to be the one that will best serve the majority of the children."⁵⁵ Since location of the school was a responsibility of each divisional board Aberhart chose to always support their decisions even when this involved physically moving a school.⁵⁶

The Minister also received petitions from various school districts for being placed in specific school divisions,⁵⁷ and from other centres to be "the logical centre of

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

⁵⁵ PAA., Minister's Papers. Aberhart to Sinclair, November 27, 1939.

⁵⁶ Ibid., Aberhart to Bolick, December 1, 1942.

⁵⁷ Ibid., Irma School District to Aberhart, October 28, 1937.

this scheme"⁵⁸ [the large unit]. His reply to such requests was always most tactful. Complainants were told that their recommendations would be considered before the final decision would be made and that the divisional board concerned would be notified of their request.

Finances remained a problem for those administering the large divisions. An interesting request received by the Minister concerned the balancing of "good" districts [those with assets] with "bad" districts [those with liabilities]. This request concerned the dissolving of Eight Mile Lake and West Lethbridge School districts and the forming of West Lethbridge Consolidated School District No. 10. In reference to this the Secretary of the Lethbridge Division stated:

This will work a very great hardship financially on this Board, because we are forced to take such districts as Coalhurst and Diamond City which were a definite liability. These districts [of West Lethbridge and Eight Mile Lake] on the other hand would be a very great asset to us. We feel that if we take the bad ones we should have some good ones to balance them.⁵⁹

In this case the request was granted as on October 16, 1939 Lethbridge Division No. 7 was extended to include West Lethbridge Consolidated School District No. 10.

The Minister also experienced some minor difficulties with some of his fellow Members of the Legislature over the

⁵⁸ Ibid., Farrow School District to Aberhart, October 28, 1937.

⁵⁹ Ibid., Glover to Aberhart, February 21, 1939.

large divisions. In the Leduc area the residents were particularly in opposition and very active in their expression of it. One Member reported that "sixty-five delegates from Leduc converged en masse on the Minister's office in protest."⁶⁰ Mr. Aberhart merely told this delegation that all would be weighed in the balance before a decision would be made. While the Minister may have been unmoved by the delegation, the Member for Leduc, R. E. Ansley, was, on the other hand, quite sensitive to their requests. In a letter to the Minister, Ansley restated the position of his constituents and also stated that he personally wanted to go on record as being opposed to the large division in this area. He further added:

If the Department should pay no heed to this direction, for my own protection, I will be obliged to release a copy of this letter to the School Boards and Social Credit Groups concerned in this constituency.⁶¹

The Minister upon receiving this communication forwarded a message to Mr. Ansley that he wished to have "a private conference" with him.⁶² No record of what took place is apparent. However, Leduc became one of the large divisions formed the next school year.

⁶⁰ Floyd M. Baker, April 29, 1970.

⁶¹ PAA., Minister's Papers. Ansley to Aberhart, December 11, 1937.

⁶² Ibid., Aberhart to Ansley, December 12, 1937.

A continuing source of opposition to the large units was from the Alberta Rural Trustees. The A.T.A. Magazine reporting on a trustees' convention held in Calgary in February 1938 pinpointed the major problems:

...secretary-treasurers of the rural districts under the new set up will have very little work to do and the Act does not provide for any salary to be paid. This, particularly in a time when ready cash is scarce, must be assumed to create at least one enemy of the large division in every district, even though the ratepayers might be saved money by entering... Many of the delegates showed signs of care and hardships of the depression; a proportion of them manifested a zeal and tenseness in keeping the office of a school trustee.⁶³

Even by 1940 some of the rural trustees were still circulating questionnaires in attempts to block or hinder the establishment of the larger divisions.⁶⁴ In an address to the Edmonton Teachers' Convention in the spring of 1940 the Minister stated that "the love of authority over the local district and a desire to control the teacher are not being given up with much grace and are definite factors which have militated against the progress of the new system."⁶⁵

Often the election of officers for the divisional boards presented problems of disruption in some localities.

⁶³ A.T.A. Magazine, March 1938. pp. 2-3.

⁶⁴ Henry Elvins Spencer Papers, Glenbow Foundation, Calgary. Rural Trustees' Association of Taber to District Ratepayers, April 1940.

⁶⁵ PAA., Minister's Papers. "Summit of the Times in Education." Address to Edmonton Teachers Convention, Spring, 1940.

To illustrate the extent of just how high feelings ran in some instances is a letter received by the Minister from West Pouce Coupe School District No. 4863. The writer requested police protection at a school meeting called "for the purpose of electing a board of trustees for the school which has recently been established by the Minister of Education," because he feared the meeting may be "disorderly."⁶⁶ Though newspaper reports and further correspondence in the Minister's papers do not yield any further information on this particular situation, it would appear that local flare-ups were not uncommon in the establishment of the large divisions in some localities.

An analysis of the geographical distribution of the opposition indicates that the opposition came from every area of the province. Petitions came to the Minister from as far north as Grande Prairie and as far south as Pincher Creek and Fort Macleod. Petitions were also received from as far east as Federal and Lougheed and as far west as Rocky Mountain House. Naturally, more protests in opposition came from areas of population concentration, but in general the whole southern two-thirds of the province which had been settled was represented. The year 1937 marked the peak of opposition protests to Aberhart. Only five opposition resolutions were received by the end of 1936, sixteen in 1937, eight in 1938, and less than three

⁶⁶ Ibid., Clarke to Aberhart, November 22, 1939.

per annum during his next five years in office. By 1937 the large units were essentially unproven. After the success of the first eleven units established during 1937, Aberhart had some positive results and this undoubtedly minimized opposition after that time.

Not all of the reports and recommendations received by the Minister were negative. Even some of the Alberta trustees in the rural areas had supported Aberhart in establishing some of the large units. He gave these an appreciative comment as he addressed their convention in January 1940.⁶⁷ Some resolutions received by the Minister even requested the establishment of large units.⁶⁸ The resolutions of support in whatever form were received from as far north as Peace River, Grande Prairie and Goodfare to as far south as Lethbridge and Foremost. From the east resolutions of support came to the Minister from Medicine Hat and Beaverdam, while similar resolutions were received from as far west as Calgary and Culp in the Lundbreck district. These supporting resolutions were most numerous in 1936 when eleven groups rallied behind the proposed government move. Other resolutions of support were received by

⁶⁷ Ibid., "Education and the Large Unit." Address to Alberta Trustees' Association. January 1940.

⁶⁸ Ibid., Goodfare School District to Aberhart, November 20, 1937; Viking School District to Aberhart, January 9, 1938; Peace River School District to Aberhart, March 25, 1938.

Aberhart in nearly all years he was Minister.⁶⁹ These resolutions of support for the establishment of the large units are as totally representative of the province geographically, as are those of opposition. As the policy of the government became apparent in the years following 1936, encouragement and positive feedback were not as necessary to provide added impetus to the change.

The Minister was always quick to point out the advantages of the large units to any audience available, particularly, how these advantages helped the students. Reporting on the forty-eight large units established by 1941 Aberhart stated:

What does this mean in terms of the life of a school child?

- 1) Every division reports progress in the establishment of libraries.
- 2) Discounts ranging from five to 50% under catalogue prices have been effected by large scale buying and the application of good business methods. Textbook rentals in various divisions have done away entirely with the hardship of expensive purchases.
- 3) Highschool dormitories have been established with costs from \$6.50 to \$12.00 per month for board, lodging and full time supervision of each student.⁷⁰

The financial success of the large divisions was a constant factor which could always be referred to in the

⁶⁹ See appendix B.

⁷⁰ PAA., Minister's Papers. "Our Task as Education-
alists." Address to the Alberta Teachers' Convention,
April 15, 1941.

face of any opposition. However, by 1941 most of the public were accepting and recognizing the fact that the large divisions did cut educational costs. Even the Educational Progress Club of Calgary, which had originally been quite critical of the large divisions, forwarded the following message to the Minister:

We have been engaged in the study of educational finance in the School Divisions of the province and while we recognize that much has yet to be done, we wish to express to you as Minister of Education our appreciation of what has already been accomplished by way of rationalizing the system of public school finance in the rural areas.⁷¹

Such a compliment from a former critic must have been most welcome by the Minister.

That the large units of school administration had brought about desirable changes in education is indicated by the limited amount of criticism concerning them in the provincial election of 1940. During that campaign none of the opposition parties were able to make any political gains from the educational issue. It is also indicative of the success of the changes to note that the educational plank of the Social Credit Party platform of 1940 began with:

We propose to complete the organization of the larger units, and still further improve the educational facilities of the Province, in order that the necessary equipment and supplies needed

⁷¹ Ibid., Educational Progress Club of Calgary to Aberhart, May 14, 1941.

in education may be provided to all our school children.⁷²

Thus the Social Credit Party and Aberhart as Minister of Education merely stated that they would continue their program if elected. Most of the opposition levelled at Social Credit was thus either directed at the monetary theory of the movement or at the political tactics of Aberhart. Even the official non-partisan opposition newspaper to the Social Credit party, The Rebel (for the year it was published), made no reference to the educational changes under Aberhart.⁷³ This paper claimed from its inception, that its pages would be totally dedicated to the overthrow of "Aberhartism and what is claimed by him to be Social Credit."⁷⁴ The omission of the educational issue by such a determined critic of Social Credit and Aberhart during this period is further evidence of the positive results of the changes in educational administration.

In the provincial election of 1940 William Aberhart and the Social Credit party were again victorious by a substantial majority. As a special interest group the A.T.A. had viewed the issue of the large units as a

⁷² "The Alberta Social Credit Platform" The Alberta Social Credit League, March 1940. p. 3.

⁷³ The Rebel, Calgary, Alberta. J. J. Zubick, editor. Volume I, April 1937 to April 1938.

⁷⁴ Ibid., April, 1937.

paramount concern during the election. While this was not the case in most areas of Alberta, the A.T.A. interpretation of this election success was nevertheless expressed as follows:

The Executive of this Association extend the hearty congratulations of our membership on the tremendous victory won by your Government in the recent provincial election. . . since in many constituencies of the Province, throughout the election campaign the large school unit was made a very definite issue, therefore the return of yourself and your Government to office by such a substantial majority in our opinion has established permanently the School Divisions in Alberta.⁷⁵

Such was later proven to be the case in spite of the fact that Aberhart was on record as stating that a plebiscite could be held within a large division concerning its future after five years. However, no plebiscite was ever asked for at the end of the five year period.⁷⁶

There are several other reasons why the Minister and his Department were so successful both in passing legislation and in implementing the large school units or divisions. To begin with conditions from an economic standpoint had demanded change. From this position the large divisions were theoretically set up to effect such economy. The fact that the Social Credit party had enjoyed such an outstanding political victory in 1935 left

⁷⁵ PAA., Minister's Papers. Barnett to Aberhart, May 21, 1940.

⁷⁶ Coutts and Walker, p. 74.

its political fortunes very secure and this in itself gave explicit support to its programs. As a political party it had campaigned, not only on economic reform, but also that Alberta would be embarking on a new social order under the guidance of Social Credit. In spite of much opposition to the large divisions the government was able to proceed on the grounds that the electorate had anticipated change. Better means of conveyance and more rural miles of roadway contributed directly to the success of the large divisions in operating as well.

That William Aberhart as Minister of Education was successful in permanently establishing the large divisions in Alberta is not open to question. It is important, however, to realize that the large units of school administration were not originally conceived either by him or his government. Aberhart's predecessor, Perren Baker, had advocated the implementation of the large units long before the advent of Social Credit. Thus despite the homage paid to William Aberhart and to his party in bringing about this aspect of educational change, it is important to realize that this change was "well developed prior to the Social Credit assumption of political authority."⁷⁷ Much speculation has been made regarding what educational changes may have taken place had the U.F.A. continued in power.

⁷⁷ Patterson, p. 78.

One study suggests that if such had been the case "the organizational reforms could not have gone ahead nearly so soon."⁷⁸ Thus while Social Credit and Aberhart may have been lacking in originality in meeting some of the administrative and economic problems of Alberta's education, they nevertheless were responsible for hastening some of the solutions to them.

⁷⁸ Wilson, p. 127.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW CURRICULUM

The introduction of the enterprise curriculum and methodology into the Alberta school system in 1936 was an event anticipated before the election of Social Credit in 1935. Early in 1934 the work of reviewing and revising the curriculum for the first six grades of Alberta's elementary schools was committed to sub-committees. Members of the normal school staffs as well as officials from the provincial Department of Education were directed to undertake the revision work. It soon became evident that a steering committee would be required to determine the type of program, necessary group divisions, and integration of subject matter. Accordingly, a co-ordinating committee of the following members was set up: Inspector L. B. Yule, Dr. D. J. Dickie, Miss O. M. Fisher, Inspector W. E. Hay, Dr. H. C. Newland, Inspector H. B. Trout, Inspector H. A. MacGregor, Principal G. K. Haverstock, Dr. M. E. Lazerte, and Dr. G. Fred McNally.¹ In three meetings in 1934 this committee found that the proposed revision was no easy task and recommended "that Dr. D. J. Dickie, Miss

¹ Twenty-Ninth Annual Report of the Department of Education of the Province of Alberta, 1934. p. 17.

O. M. Fisher and W. E. Hay be released from all other work for some weeks at the beginning of 1935 to outline a plan of work for the elementary and intermediate grades along the lines of decisions reached."²

The first meeting of this co-ordinating committee began the task of drafting a program of "activities" or "enterprises" for both the primary grades (I, II and III), and for the junior grades (IV, V and VI). This new program was presented to the Joint Conference of Inspectors and Normal School Instructors, held in June 1935. The Department of Education Annual Report for that year states the outcome:

Under recommendation from the Inspectors, two or three teachers were selected from each Inspectorate and invited to take a special course of instruction at the Summer School in the theory, objectives, and procedures of the new program, in order that they might try it out in their own schools during the year 1935-36. Approximately 75 teachers were selected under this arrangement, and reports indicate that the results of the experiment are, on the whole, highly satisfactory.³

One of the major problems during this early formative period was not in explaining the new program to the public but in explaining it to the teachers who were to use it. A special legislative committee had been appointed

² Ibid., pp. 17-18.

³ Thirtieth Annual Report of the Department of Education of the Province of Alberta, 1935. p. 19. Hereafter cited Thirtieth Annual Report, 1935.

early in 1935 to make a comprehensive study of Alberta's rural education and to report to the next session of the Assembly. The report of this committee, submitted April 12, 1935, gave the teachers a fairly clear picture of how the new program differed from the older traditional approaches:

The great handicap of the traditional type of one-teacher school is the large number of 'recitations' required for many subjects in many grades. The progressive conception of education, however, replaces verbal recitation with socialized activity. Integration of subject matter is effected through large units of work developed around genuine life interests and experiences. Children are not classified in closely homogeneous groups on a basis of achievements in skills or factual knowledge, but work together, as people do in life outside the school, on enterprises of common interest in which each participates according to his ability. . . . The groups cut across one another, and the child who is the admired and respected leader in literary activities may become the humble follower of an erstwhile school dullard when there is a sand-table to be constructed, or scenery to be painted for the school play.⁴

This new enterprise program was "built on the principle that education is a social experience in the course of which pupils plan, initiate and carry out, co-operative projects."⁵ Teachers were also told that while this new program would give greater freedom to students and teachers alike, it would also entail "greater responsibility and

⁴ PAA., Minister's Papers. "Dr. H. C. Newland to the Canadian Education Association." October 19, 1936.

⁵ Thirtieth Annual Report, 1935. p. 19.

demands on the ability, initiative and resources"⁶ of both.

The year 1935 not only saw the new program brought in on an introductory basis but with the changing of the provincial government, some administrative adjustment in the Department of Education also occurred. Dr. G. Fred McNally, former Chief Supervisor of Schools, became the new Deputy Minister under Aberhart, while Dr. H. C. Newland became Chief Supervisor of Schools. To Dr. Newland's department fell the full load of curriculum revision. Having been on the original revision committees, Dr. Newland was able to carry on with little hesitation.

The year 1936 was to mark the real beginning of the new program throughout the province. During the summer school session at the University of Alberta, a special course on the enterprise program was offered for the benefit of teachers who desired special preparation for it. The committee members who had worked so diligently on this new program remained somewhat cautious in the implementation of the new approach. They recommended "that only teachers having special training and experience in the enterprise work should be asked to attempt in September a full enterprise program. Others would be expected to

⁶ Ibid.

attempt two or three enterprises during the year."⁷ Thus in September 1936, the enterprise program was widely utilized throughout Alberta even though on a somewhat restricted basis.

The year 1935 also saw the first report of the general committee for the revision of the high school curriculum. This committee appointed by Perren Baker in 1934, was chaired by Dr. H. C. Newland. The first report contained several recommendations for a more sequential course of studies not only in the high school grades, but also in the intermediate grades of VII, VIII and IX, as well as a recommendation that a new course of studies be introduced the following year.⁸

This committee also made several noteworthy recommendations during 1936 which were consequently carried out over the next three years. Concerning examinations it recommended:

- (1) That the number of examinations be reduced and, accordingly, that Departmental examinations be given only at the end of the Grade IX course and of the Grade XII course.
- (2) That the Grade IX examination consist of one question paper in each of the subjects; English (Literature and composition together), Mathematics, General Science, Social Studies, and three options; and that it be a general test on

⁷ Thirty-first Annual Report of the Department of Education of Alberta, 1936. p. 15.

⁸ Thirtieth Annual Report, 1935. p. 20.

the mastery of subject-matter.

- (3) That at the end of the Grade XII course there be three examinations (a) University Matriculation (b) Normal Entrance (c) High School Graduation Diploma (Commercial, Technical, General).⁹

Specific recommendations on subjects were also made. In French emphasis was to be placed upon conversational usage while the English course was to be a unified sequence for all the high school grades; in social studies the emphasis was to be away from the chronological treatment of history and in the direction of what may be styled the "Rugg Approach," i.e., an integration of history, geography and civics.¹⁰ Another recommendation involved the weighting of subjects and suggested that "the general course in Grades X, XI and XII consist of any seven subjects each year with a minimum of 105 credits for three years."¹¹

By 1937 the new program for the elementary, intermediate and high school grades was well under way. Dr. H. C. Newland in making his annual report for the year stated:

During the year 1937 the Department of Education has carried forward the revision of the school programs begun three years before, and has brought into full operation the new policies inaugurated during the preceding year. One the whole, the new programs are

⁹ PAA., Minister's Papers. "Minutes of the General Committee on Revision of the High School Course of Study," January 10 and 11, 1936.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

working out with a large measure of general satisfaction.¹²

Although solutions to minor problems were constantly required, on the whole, curriculum revision appeared to be a relatively smooth process during these early years.

As Minister of Education, Aberhart appears to have supported the major revision through all its crucial stages. As one study later stated:

The advocates of the new curriculum were fortunate to have Premier William Aberhart as Minister of Education. He had spent many years of his life in the classroom and was sympathetic and encouraging. . . He believed that we must educate for democracy and that the common people are going to mould society. To get a democratic state, you put the child into a democratic situation. This is exactly what the new curriculum was designed to do.¹³

The Minister in addressing the Alberta Home and School Federation in November 1936 made his position clear when he proposed that the following questions be studied by the Federation:

- (1) Why has the old curriculum of studies proved itself inadequate for the present day?
- (2) What should be the goal of the educational system of the future in respect to the character of its output?
- (3) Is the proposed new curriculum designed to lead to our cherished ideals for the future?¹⁴

¹² Thirty-Second Annual Report of the Department of Education of the Province of Alberta, 1937. p. 14.

¹³ Sheane, p. 115.

¹⁴ PAA., Minister's Papers. "Address to the Alberta Home and School Federation," November 6, 1936.

By way of further elaboration the Minister continued:

I am more than persuaded that you will all agree with me that the output of our school under the old curriculum is wholly unsatisfactory. -- Not that we are not producing an insufficient or untrained bunch of white-collar job seekers; but because our well-trained graduates can find no niche to fill in life. If our educational set-up had been a business concern, and could not get any greater demand for its output than we have had, I am quite satisfied that they would have closed up the schools long ago.¹⁵

Aberhart also called for "humanization of education"¹⁶ when he stated:

We have attempted to make our schools so practical in order to teach every boy and every girl how to earn a living, that we have neglected the better qualities of life and the higher standards of virtue. Selfishness has been our aim not service.¹⁷

As Minister of Education Aberhart lost few opportunities in explaining the new program. In a radio address in 1937 the Minister reported favorably on the new program as "a curriculum which has converted the classroom from a listening post to a hive of activity with children working and planning the solution of a problem and then co-operating in working out that solution."¹⁸ Aberhart also spoke in glowing terms of the improvements made in the inter-

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ This is how his address was reported in The Albertan, November 9, 1936.

¹⁷ Supra, p. 78, n. 14.

¹⁸ Supra, p. 59, n. 50.

mediate grades:

These contain a generous number of options to test the taste and aptitude of the pupils. It gathers a great deal of data with reference to the pupil besides that which appears from his class work. All this with judgement of parents, makes possible a program of guidance which will assist the pupil in making right choices when he enters the High School.¹⁹

While the Minister appears to have supported the new program of studies it is interesting to note some of the public reaction to the same. A former colleague of the Minister and a teacher of experience both before and after the new program was introduced stated, "The new curriculum was the beginning of the 'permissive era' and the beginnings of our troubles with youth."²⁰ Others, however, appear to have supported the changes enthusiastically. As early as November 1935 the new Minister received the following suggestion submitted by the Educational Progress Club of Calgary in regard to course changes:

Any courses offered, whether 'academic' or not, could be fitted to the capacities and needs of the individual students and brought into relation to the problems of modern living. Teachers would be released from their present bondage to examinations to do some real teaching; and in this shift from drill sergeant to teacher, far more than a shift from 'academic' to 'non-academic' (though doubtless many changes in subjects of study could be made to advantage), would be reflected in the

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ A. V. Bourcier, April 29, 1970.

essential nature of the 'municipal' schools.²¹

This club appears to have grasped the meaning of the new program of studies to a large degree.

Public reaction to the new curriculum was heard from some quarters. The slightly increased costs for new textbooks and materials was one area which received some attention. The following resolution received by the Minister is typical:

Resolved: that the provincial government provide textbooks for all public and highschools throughout the province.²²

These costs were one issue which related directly to the reasoning behind the large units of school administration. However, costs in relation to the curriculum revision did not become a major public issue.

In his annual report in 1938 Dr. H. C. Newland pointed to a possible factor limiting public reaction to the new curriculum:

Except for some minor details, the committees appointed in 1934 to revise the school curricula for Grades I to XII have now finished their work. The revised program for Grade XI was introduced in September 1938, and the revised program for Grade XII will be ready for use in September 1939.

²¹ PAA., Minister's Papers. "Educational Proposal," submitted to Aberhart by the Educational Progress Club of Calgary, November, 1935.

²² Ibid., Sibbald Social Credit Group to Aberhart, September 21, 1937. Similar resolutions came from the Edmonton Constituency Association of the Alberta Social Credit League, October 11, 1937; I.O.D.E. Chapter, Sibbald, October 26, 1937; and Helmsdale Social Credit Group, October 28, 1937.

These committees have done a good job. Despite the limited resources at their command, they have performed the tasks assigned to them in such a way as to win not only the approval of progressive citizens in this province, but also recognition from outstanding educationists in all parts of the Dominion. The revised curricula will not, however, prove satisfactory for more than a few years. In the realms of social, economic, and political ideas, the climate of opinion is changing and changing rapidly. The tempo of change in educational thought and procedures has greatly increased during the last ten, or even five years.²³

The fact that minor curriculum revisions were constantly bringing about new changes thus minimized public reaction somewhat.

One example of such change involved the optional subjects in the high school curriculum. It was decided that subjects such as art, shop, home economics, type-writing, and dramatics would be optional in all high school grades.²⁴ A maximum of thirty-five credit hours per week for Grades X, XI and XII had also been set. However, several optional subjects were given a value of four-credit hours thereby limiting students in their choice of these subjects while adhering to the credit restrictions. The Minister, hoping to solve this difficulty, sought advice from one of his former teachers at Crescent Heights High School in Calgary. Mabel Giles suggested that the maximum

²³ Thirty-third Annual Report of the Department of Education of the Province of Alberta, 1938. p. 14.

²⁴ Supra, p. 77, n. 9.

number of credit hours should be lifted and that optional subjects be given credit hours of two, three, or five to enable students to have a wider choice of options.²⁵

Aberhart seemed pleased with this solution and forwarded Giles' suggestion to his Deputy Minister for further consideration.²⁶

It is noteworthy that one common parental complaint with curriculum changes was that children "seemed to enjoy" school. "There must be something phoney about the new course," one parent reported, "for the kids won't come home at four o'clock to do the chores."²⁷ In general the reaction of parents to the new changes was favorable.²⁸

One problem involved the time lapse between formulating the philosophy behind the enterprise and its implementation by teachers. In 1940 Aberhart stated one of the major factors militating against the enterprise program:

Another hindrance to rapid progress lies in the adjustment that is so essential in the new enterprise method of instruction. It takes time to get a new generation of teachers - teachers with a new concept of purpose and method. The rate of progress will largely depend upon the spirit of enthusiasm

²⁵ PAA., Minister's Papers. Giles to Aberhart, December 12, 1938.

²⁶ Ibid., Aberhart to McNally, December 15, 1938.

²⁷ Supra, p. 74, n. 4.

²⁸ Ibid.

with which the teachers attack their problems.²⁹

Explaining the new enterprise program to the public was a constant task of those responsible for its inception. Dr. H. C. Newland pointed out some of its apparent advantages to children in contrast to what some parents were anticipating:

Many parents measure the value of a school curriculum in terms of their own school experience. When they went to school no such nonsense went on in the classroom as their children seem to enjoy - They think of schooling as learning from books. Education means to them the traditional subject-matter outcomes, and these they expect for their children. [Under the enterprise program] ... the pupil may not 'learn' as much, in the sense of acquiring the ability to reproduce verbalized information or factual material, but he will have had a richer intellectual experience; because the enterprise is a motivational device, - a procedure for visualizing classroom work. Through the enterprise technique, the pupil does not merely learn to listen to the teacher, or memorize by rote. He learns to listen to his classmates, to share their experience and problems, to cooperate with them in the performance of tasks that are more or less self-imposed and recognized by the group to be interesting and worthwhile.³⁰

Another positive aspect of the enterprise program concerning reading, was brought to the attention of the public by Olive Fisher, one of the major participants in formulating the new program:

No subject in the Course of Study has been more

²⁹ Supra, p. 63, n. 65.

³⁰ PAA., Minister's Papers. Dr. H. C. Newland "The Alberta Programme of Studies for the Elementary School," Alberta Home and School News, October 19, 1938. p. 1.

affected by Enterprise Education than that of reading. . . Under the organization involved in an enterprise a great deal of reading must be done by both teacher and pupils. Different children have different problems to solve, or materials to gather, and set about finding a solution to their problems by searching books. When this is found, reports are made to the rest of the class . . . The child's speed of reading, too, is affected. He learns to read quickly and yet accurately, for good reading depends on good speed. He gets information from a variety of sources - newspapers, magazines, readers, books of travel, stories, thus building up broad interests in reading and developing varied abilities and tastes.³¹

The principal of the Practice School in Edmonton, W. D. McDougall, was also active in proclaiming the advantages of the program. In explaining the new social studies for the intermediate grades he stated:

It inducts the pupil into his cultural environment through the medium of geography, history and civics. In Grade VII the pupil studies the geographical and historical background of the important national races which are contributing to the development of Canada. In Grade VIII the theme broadens to include the Empire and its great neighbor, the United States. And, finally, in Grade IX, the pupil becomes absorbed in the great movements and forces, political, social and economic, which are the dominating factors in the world today. When the pupil graduates from Grade IX he has had the opportunity through reading, discussion and debate to develop an appreciation of the magnitude and importance of those problems which his generation must solve.³²

³¹ Ibid., Olive M. Fisher "New Techniques in Enterprise Education," Alberta Home and School News, November 15, 1938. p. 1.

³² Ibid., W. D. MacDougall, "Social Studies -- What is Included in the New Title?" Alberta Home and School News, November 15, 1938. p. 1.

It is interesting to note the effects of World War II upon the new curriculum. As the conflict heightened, greater stress was placed upon not only the teacher, but also upon the value of the end product of the enterprise program. Thus the Minister stated:

If the educationists of our democracies do not guard and protect our culture and our civilization, tell me who should be asked to do so?

We have introduced into our schools, a program designed expressly to teach our young people the art of living peaceably together, the art of intelligent collaboration, growing out of natural interests and curiosities, in ways discovered and explored by group discussion. In this enterprise plan we are proceeding deliberately and without haste, learning as we go.³³

Dr. H. C. Newland in an address to the fall convention of teachers also spoke along similar lines. His speech was entitled "Teachers of Democracy" and he placed four propositions before his audience:

- (1) Every teacher must be a student of our society;
- (2) A human being is a cultured product;
- (3) New education is the religion of democracy;
- (4) The teacher must be an evangelist for democracy and a social engineer.³⁴

He further added "that it is impossible to build a democratic culture on a traditional education. The present program of studies in Alberta is not a program of subjects

³³ Supra, p. 66, n. 70.

³⁴ Edmonton Bulletin, October 16, 1941.

but one which promotes a type of activity which will give the child a chance to grow and develop."³⁵

While the aims of the new program were often debated, the enterprise, generally speaking, had become a permanent feature of the Alberta curriculum by the early 1940's. Considering the degree of change in the curriculum, it is quite surprising that the public reaction towards it was so limited. While the new enterprise program has been referred to as a "revolt against the traditional school"³⁶ by some educators, the apparent lack of formal protest as evidenced in the Minister's papers appears to indicate that it was never regarded as such by the general rank and file of the public. Possibly one of the best explanations for this situation is suggested by the fact that another educational issue, that of the large division, was the primary issue during this period. As one authority stated, "The curriculum had interest, yes, but people don't get as exercised about the curriculum as they do when someone says 'they are going to close our school down the road and we're going to have to go ten miles to school!'"³⁷ Major curriculum revision was also something that was the end pro-

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Sheane, p. 115.

³⁷ Ernest C. Manning, May 25, 1970.

duct of a long series of studies. The public had ample time to adjust to the changes, and when these changes were implemented the transition was fairly smooth.

The Minister's papers indicate that many people were aware that changes were being made in the curriculum. In 1935 and 1936 several public proposals were submitted to the Minister urging him to introduce the teaching of Social Credit in Alberta schools.³⁸ Aberhart also received a brief from Charles M. Scarborough, who had originally introduced Social Credit to Aberhart, on the teaching of its doctrines in the classroom.³⁹ His proposal seemed to strike a responsive chord in Aberhart. In a speech to the Alberta Teachers' Convention in Calgary in November 1935, Aberhart appealed to the teachers to get behind the Social Credit movement. He further asked them "to sweep away the cobwebs of the old financial system" from their minds and asked for teacher support "in instructing the public as to the meaning of Social Credit."⁴⁰ To some this was regarded as a threat; to others it was a "flagrant attempt to force the

³⁸ PAA., Minister's Papers. Proposals to Aberhart from Sundial Social Credit Group, September 25, 1935; Olds Town Council, November 13, 1935; Educational Progress Club of Calgary, November 1935; and Didsbury Social Credit Group, August, 1936.

³⁹ Ibid., Charles M. Scarborough, "Brief on Education" to Aberhart, November 19, 1935.

⁴⁰ A.T.A. Magazine, November, 1935. p. 15.

views of a political party upon teachers and scholars alike."⁴¹ The Minister's papers contain no counter-proposals against the teaching of Social Credit in the Alberta curriculum. Aberhart did reply to a request from a Calgary teacher who was preparing a manual for her Grade IX social studies. Her request was for "a concise statement of Social Credit principles that would be suitable for a Grade IX textbook."⁴² This manual was to include the views of the newly formed Cooperative Commonwealth Federation and old-line parties as well as Social Credit. The Minister complied with this request. No further reference to the manual or to the teaching of Social Credit appears in the Minister's papers after this request.

As Minister of Education, Aberhart also received other resolutions requesting various changes in the curriculum. In February 1936, the Edmonton Social Study Club requested the "giving of greater prominence in both Public and High schools to such subjects as Biology, Sex, and Psychology."⁴³ The Minister expressed appreciation to this group for the suggestions and indicated that when the time came their

⁴¹ H. N. Moore, "What of Social Credit?" Part II. p. 15.

⁴² PAA.; Minister's Papers. Bagnall to Aberhart, August 7, 1936. See Appendix D for a copy of the Minister's reply to this request.

⁴³ PAA., Minister's Papers. Edmonton Social Study Club to Aberhart, February 20, 1936.

wishes would be considered. While this request was never directly fulfilled, a minimum of five periods per week in general science was proposed for the next academic term by the committee dealing with high school revisions. This was carried out.⁴⁴

The Minister also received requests and petitions from various church groups and temperance leagues to educate Alberta school children on the evils of alcohol. Typical is the following resolution:

Realizing the deteriorating power of all alcoholic drinks, we the above class, petition you in your capacity as minister of education, to seek education for our young people in this regard.⁴⁵

Aberhart answered these petitions with words of encouragement. The petitioners were admonished to "carry on in your fight for that cause you have espoused."⁴⁶ No apparent change in the curriculum was effected.

As was the case with the establishment of the large units of school administration in Alberta, much of the ground work for curriculum revisions was underway when

⁴⁴ Supra, p. 77, n. 9.

⁴⁵ PAA., Minister's Papers. Crescent Heights Baptist Church, Calgary, to Aberhart, August 29, 1936. Other similar resolutions were received from the British Columbia Temperance League, January 7, 1936; the Alberta Temperance League, February, 1936 and the Women's Christian Temperance Union of Alberta, January 23, 1936.

⁴⁶ Ibid., Aberhart to the Women's Christian Temperance Union of Alberta, January 25, 1936.

Aberhart became Minister of Education in 1935. That Aberhart was able to cooperate with and retain such excellent educational thinkers as Dr. G. Fred McNally, Dr. H. C. Newland, Dr. D. J. Dickie and several others within his Department is to his credit. By utilizing these capable individuals who had been associated with curriculum change in its initial stages, the new curriculum and enterprise methodology were introduced with a minimal amount of friction from public quarters. By uniting the curriculum changes to the establishment of the large units impetus was given to both of these major educational changes.

CHAPTER V

TEACHERS' PROFESSIONALIZATION

William Aberhart and the Social Credit party had taken office when the financial condition of the province was desperate. "They were faced with provincial debts totalling 148 million dollars. Over 15 million dollars in direct obligations were due within seven months and there was not even sufficient money in the treasury to pay the civil service salaries on October 15, 1935."¹

This dire financial situation was reflected in Alberta's educational system as well. Many of the schools had fallen into ill-repair and equipment was virtually nonexistent. High schools in most rural areas of the province were not to be found. Several schools were able to function for a scant portion of the year because of lack of funds. Statistics quoted for the year 1935 give some indication of how serious the latter problem had become.

In 1935, 1,726 Alberta children had received less than twenty days schooling; 4,944 had less than two months; 9,035 less than three months; 11,497 less than four months; and 17,283 less than six months.²

As far as the teachers of the province were concerned the

¹ Schultz, p. 177.

² The Albertan, February 5, 1936.

educational scene was further blackened by the fact that unpaid teachers salaries had accumulated to the sum of roughly 250,000 dollars. This was the educational situation that greeted William Aberhart as Alberta's new Minister of Education in 1935.

The teachers of Alberta during the depression years had ample cause for complaint. Not only were conditions and salaries at an extremely low level, but teachers were frustrated in any attempts they made towards improving the situation. As one authority stated concerning the teachers' plight:

Nor did they enjoy any fringe benefits to protect them from the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. . . Competition from unqualified personnel was an ever present threat. . . Salaries were determined by individual negotiation between the hardnosed trustee, on the one hand, and the often immature and inexperienced teacher, on the other.³

While the teacher often saw himself as a pawn of the local school board, there was another side to the picture. Perren Baker, Minister of Education, 1921-1935, summed up the situation with regard to teachers' salaries as follows:

There was a time when the [school] grants were not very big, and every little local school district had to raise a sum of money. And in very many places that little girl [the teacher] who came from the district or the neighboring one, went back and was getting more [salary] than the farmers who had to raise it. They didn't have as much as she was getting.⁴

³ J. W. Chalmers, Teachers of the Foothills Province. (Toronto, 1968), pp. 5-6.

⁴ Wilson, p. 142.

While this was often the case, many teachers in western Canada were experiencing hardships in addition to their low salaries. Often decent accommodation was not available. Socially too, teachers were often regarded as outsiders or intruders and excluded from community functions.⁵

The combination of these educational problems and frustrations had prodded the teachers of the province to unite. The Alberta Teachers' Association was their professional organization but because of its voluntary nature its effect was greatly weakened. Before the coming of the Social Credit government in 1935, the Association had tried to make its position more secure. An authority on this development stated concerning the last year of the U.F.A. administration, "The Teachers' Society Bill, as introduced by Mr. C. A. Ronning, member for Camrose, would have made the holding of a teachers' position in Alberta dependent on membership in the Alberta Teachers' Association."⁶ In introducing the bill Mr. Ronning claimed it would release the teachers from the annual drudgery of canvassing membership and enable them to pursue the aims and objects for which the Alberta Teachers' Association stood.⁷ However,

⁵ For an excellent development of this theme see Max Braithwaite, Why Shoot the Teacher? (Toronto, 1965).

⁶ Goresky, p. 141.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 141-142.

because of opposition from rural trustees and others who felt this would only increase friction between teachers and the public, the compulsory membership clause was deleted when the bill was passed.

The teachers as a whole resented this action which they regarded as an outright denial of their wishes and this further alienated them from the U.F.A. administration. Thus with the Social Credit victory in 1935, the Alberta Teachers' Association attacked the previous administration by stating editorially that the U.F.A. government was "incapable of viewing our school system otherwise than as a first-class vote-catching device."⁸ The change of administrations was viewed as highly desirable by the editor of the magazine.

The new Minister of Education was favorably disposed toward granting professional status to teachers. However, Aberhart approached this issue with some degree of caution. Typical were his remarks in addressing a teachers' convention in the fall of 1935, where he declared that, while he was not opposed to professional status, teachers should not suppose that the law would make teaching a profession. "The teacher must impress the public with his personal worth and the public will grant him a position of honor."⁹

⁸ A.T.A. Magazine, September, 1935. p. 1.

⁹ Ibid., November, 1935. p. 15.

The Alberta Teachers' Association lost little time in pressing the Minister to help them in strengthening their organization. In February 1936, the following communication from the A.T.A. was received by Aberhart:

We beg to submit herewith a copy of 'The Teaching Profession Act, 1935' with suggested amendments for which we respectfully request your kind consideration:

The said Act is further amended as to Section 4 thereof, (a) in subsection (1) by striking out the words 'shall be eligible for membership in the Association' appearing after the words, 'Department of Education of the Province of Alberta,' and substituting therefor the words 'shall, as a condition of their employment, be members of the Association.'¹⁰

The Alberta Teachers' Association in this appeal to the Minister had reaffirmed their stand that only by compulsory membership could the teachers of the province approach professional status.

If the A.T.A. was diligent in seeking teachers' professionalism, the Alberta School Trustees' Association was no less diligent in their active opposition to it. One of several resolutions passed at their annual convention in February 1936, was concerned directly with this issue:

Resolved that "with regard to the teachers' professional Act and legislation governing contracts, the executive be instructed to keep in touch with proposed legislation with a view to protecting the present rights of the boards in entering into and terminating contracts with teachers; insisting upon a distinction being made between teachers of experience, superior qualifications and proven ability,

¹⁰ PAA., Minister's Papers. Alberta Teachers' Association to Aberhart, February 19, 1936.

and beginners without such special qualifications; to guard, if possible, against the introduction of the compulsory membership for all teachers in the proposed organization.¹¹

To the trustees, the gaining of professional status by teachers represented another threat to the retention of local autonomy.

In spite of the opposition of the trustees, during the first sitting of the legislature in 1936, "An Act to amend The Teaching Profession Act, 1935" was assented to on April 3. This Act not only met fully the desires of the A.T.A. as to compulsory membership but it was an exact replica of the recommended amendments suggested by the Association in February of the same year.¹² The Act also provided for "disciplinary powers of the Association over its members and provided for a Teaching Professional Appeal Board of three -- two being appointed by the government."¹³ The Act outlined the duties and powers of the Board as follows: "(a) to appoint a chairman and secretary; (b) to serve as a board of appeal in case of suspension or expulsion or other disciplining of members of the Association, or to investigate on the order of the Minister cases

¹¹ The Calgary Daily Herald, February 7, 1936.

¹² Statutes of Alberta, 1936, c.88, s.3.

¹³ A. F. McGoun, "Social Credit Legislation: A Survey." Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science. Volume II, 1936. pp. 517-518.

involving suspension or cancellation of teachers' certificates."¹⁴ In the event that a teacher was suspended or expelled from membership in the Association, or was otherwise disciplined by the Executive Council, such a teacher was entitled to appeal to the Appeal Board. If this Board upheld the decision of the Executive Council, the A.T.A. could then advise the Minister to suspend or cancel the certificate of the guilty teacher. The A.T.A. must have been well satisfied with legislation which granted it the wide range of authority over its members, and Aberhart's government was the first in Canada to do so.¹⁵

The public reaction to the Teachers' Profession Act was minimal. In July 1936, the Minister received one resolution against the Act,¹⁶ but even the Alberta Teachers' Association appears to have submitted no formal protest. Some members of the public did have some reservations concerning the Act and even a former teacher and member of the legislature in 1935, stated later, "I supported the Teaching Profession Act strongly. I was however, against total compulsion [of membership]. Compulsion leads to dictator-

¹⁴ Statutes of Alberta, 1936, c.88, s.11.

¹⁵ Alberta Government, A Tribute to William Aberhart. (1943), p. 14.

¹⁶ PAA., Minister's Papers. South Edmonton School District to Aberhart, July 21, 1936.

ial procedure and the rank and file loses its say."¹⁷

The teachers themselves were most appreciative of the legislation passed on their behalf. Typical is the following resolution submitted by a teachers' convention in the Drumheller area, October 1936:

Whereas the Alberta legislature has seen fit to grant professional status to teachers of Alberta and whereas we are very grateful for the same Be it resolved that this Convention send a vote of thanks to that body.¹⁸

If the Minister appeared to have supported the principle of teachers' professionalism before the actual legislation was passed, he was no less forceful in his support during the post-legislation period. In a radio address in the fall of 1937 he made the following remarks concerning some of the results of this professionalism:

We have granted professional status to teachers. It is now possible for the teaching body to express its views as a group in such a way as to assist very materially in the solution of educational problems. . . . Officials of the organization have already demonstrated a keen desire to assist in building up a better educational service.¹⁹

The Minister thus appeared to have been satisfied with the direction in which the A.T.A. was moving.

¹⁷ A. V. Bourcier, April 29, 1970.

¹⁸ PAA., Minister's Papers. Drumheller Teachers' Convention to Aberhart, October 19, 1936.

¹⁹ Supra, p. 59, n. 50.

Other members in the field of education also were quick to point out the advantages of teacher professionalism. Reviewing past developments in a public newsletter, Dr. M. E. Lazerte stated in 1939:

In 1936 the Teaching Profession Act was passed whereby Alberta's six thousand teachers automatically became members of the Teachers' Association. The Provincial Association had been very strong for many years. Seventy per cent of all teachers were members when membership was voluntary. Before the Act was passed, over ninety per cent of the teachers-in-service, both members and non-members, voted in favor of automatic membership.

The Teaching Profession Act created also a Discipline Committee with power to discipline teachers. This Committee has been rather active. Several teachers have been charged with, proved guilty of, and penalized for unprofessional conduct. The standards of ethics are being raised. Fair dealings with one another and with school boards are being insisted upon. Present A.T.A. policy is characterized by much true professionalism.²⁰

That the 'Discipline Committee,' referred to by Dr. Lazerte, was very thorough and judiciously fair in its decisions is evident from a complete record of one of its proceedings as received by the Minister.²¹

Even after teachers' professionalism had become firmly established, the Minister was still offering advice

²⁰ PAA., Minister's Papers. Dr. M. E. Lazerte, "Alberta's Teaching Profession Act." Alberta Home and School News March 15, 1939. p. 1.

²¹ For an excellent account of proceedings see Ibid., "Complaint of unprofessional conduct against John Wasył Huculak," Teacher of Chernowci School District No. 1456, Wostok, Alberta, July 3, 1939.

to those most vitally concerned. Addressing a teachers' convention in 1941 he stated:

In the face of some opposition, the Government felt that the leadership of this profession is fit to be trusted with responsibilities and powers like those vested in the Medical or Law Societies. The trust is now reposed in you.²²

The Minister thus expressed the idea that the success or failure of the teachers as a professional body rested solely upon themselves.

The Teaching Profession Act as passed in April 1936, was never an issue of public dissent. As a close associate of the Minister states, "The fact that the teachers were being given professional status was of really no significant concern to the rank and file of the public. They were interested and they had views on it but it was something that did not touch them too directly."²³ Quite possibly, the issue of a large division of school administration was the real over-shadowing concern of the public and when viewed in this light teachers' professionalism became somewhat secondary.

The issue of professional status for teachers had been an upward struggle for the A.T.A. With the coming of Social Credit and William Aberhart an opportunity to lobby successfully for professionalism presented itself. While the actual legislation was not an original scheme formulated

²² Supra, p. 86, n. 33.

²³ Ernest C. Manning, May 25, 1970.

by the new government or the new Minister, it is significant that both were attuned to the needs of one of Alberta's largest professions. Alberta was the first province in Canada to recognize its teachers as a professional group and as such it set the pattern for other provinces. As one study stated in 1949:

One trend which has gained some momentum in the war years has been a move towards requiring compulsory membership in provincial teachers' associations. Prior to 1944 such compulsory membership had been stipulated in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and New Brunswick. In 1944 Ontario and Prince Edward Island were added. In 1947 British Columbia followed.²⁴

²⁴ Cole, p. 262.

CHAPTER VI

DENYING THE HONORARY DEGREE

As leader of the first Social Credit government in the world William Aberhart received much personal criticism. As the second 'third' party in power in a country whose politics were historically rooted in the two party system, political ploys against Social Credit were the order of the day. One such ploy is evident in the Minister's papers.

It had become the practice of the University of Alberta "to confer an honorary degree on the Premier after his second successful appeal to the electorate."¹ Aberhart had received his second mandate from the people in the provincial election in 1940 and thus according to custom he qualified for an honorary degree. A special committee of the Senate, chaired by H. H. Parlee, had decided in the spring of 1941 that Aberhart should receive the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws (L.L.D.) and had gone ahead and notified the Minister of the same as well as asked him to give the convocation address on May 19, 1941. As a former teacher, and one who had already received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Queen's University, Aberhart was most pleased to

¹ Coutts and Walker, p. 88.

to accept the honor and quickly set to work on the address.

Its opening remarks were humorous:

I should like first of all, to thank the Members of the Senate and the Board of Governors for their kindness in bestowing upon me the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Laws. I appreciate it all the more, since it comes from our own splendid University, one of the best in Canada.

I am not particularly concerned about the extra letters I shall have added to my name, B.A.L.L.D., I have been bald for many years, even without the Degree.²

However, Aberhart never delivered the address nor did he receive the honorary degree. In a meeting of the whole Senate with the University President the day before the spring convocation, during the usual vote approving recommendations for honorary degrees, the recommendation of Aberhart was turned down by a small majority. The Deputy Minister, Dr. McNally was selected to convey this decision to Aberhart. The Deputy Minister's recollections of the incident were as follows:

He took the news quite calmly, merely asking if I thought those who spoke and voted against him did it by way of political reprisal. My answer was "Nothing had been said against him as being unworthy of the honor, but extreme bitterness had been shown in regard to his political policies." He said that of course he could not under the circumstances appear at Convocation, and I was to so advise the President.³

Thus William Aberhart was denied the honorary degree because of "a pure political spite on the part of a few

² PAA., Minister's Papers. "Proposed Convocation Address." May 19, 1941.

³ Coutts and Walker, pp. 88-89.

individuals."⁴

Not unlike the event, the aftermath of this incident proved to be somewhat unpleasant. Some suggestions were even heard for hostile action against the University, although no actual reprisals were ever carried out.⁵ The political and personal following of the Minister were not at all pleased with the situation. The Minister received several resolutions against the University Senate "in refusing to confer an honorary degree upon one so deserving of the honor."⁶ One of the more interesting resolutions was from the Alberta Avenue Social Credit Group of Edmonton demanding a public hearing into the facts behind the denial "so that a repetition of this disgraceful matter will be impossible in the future."⁷

For the individuals most directly involved the event was to have considerable consequences. Both the University President, W. A. R. Kerr, and H. H. Parlee, who had chaired the Senate Committee dealing with honorary de-

⁴ Ernest C. Manning, May 25, 1970. During ten interviews conducted with Social Credit, opposition and politically neutral individuals, this writer found that without exception all regarded the denial as a "political move" or a "political insult."

⁵ Coutts and Walker, p. 89.

⁶ PAA., Minister's Papers. Resolution from Calgary Social Credit to Aberhart, May 24, 1941.

⁷ Ibid., Resolution from Alberta Avenue Social Credit Group to Aberhart, June 19, 1941.

grees submitted their resignations. Parlee's resignation clearly illustrates the position both took:

Please accept my resignation as Chairman of the Board of Governors of the University of Alberta. I am taking this step because of the recent action of the Senate in rejecting a recommendation of its Committee on Honorary Degrees, of which I am a member, to grant the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws to the Honourable Mr. Aberhart. This action, contrary to the usual custom and practice existing for upwards of twelve years, I consider unfair and unjust.

Relying upon the invariable custom and practice of the Senate to adapt such recommendations without debate, Dr. Kerr and myself invited Mr. Aberhart to accept the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws from the University and to make the Convocation address. The rejection by the Senate of such recommendation, in my view, leaves me in an untenable position.⁸

In a similar letter, President Kerr also submitted his resignation because of his "untenable position."⁹

These resignations soon ballooned into a major issue for all concerned. The potential political accusations which could be levelled at the government was a factor to be considered. The immediate heat of the whole issue further complicated matters. Dr. G. Fred McNally, as Deputy Minister, offered some suggestions as to how the resignations could be dealt with:

I should like to make two or three observations relative to the situation precipitated by the resignation of the President and the Chairman of the Governors of the University.

⁸ Ibid., Parlee to Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council, May 20, 1941.

⁹ Ibid., Kerr to Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council, May 20, 1941.

Realizing the character of the opponents of the recommendation of the Senate's standing committee it is not unreasonable to expect that the charge will be made that these men were coerced to resign because of the displeasure of the Government. Denial on behalf of the Government would have no more effect than the President's denial of pressure in the matter of the proposal to confer the degree in the first instance. If the Government could induce Mr. Parlee either to withdraw his resignation or to accept re-appointment, we should have the most effective answer to such a charge that could be given.¹⁰

That the Minister was looking for a graceful way out of a rather embarrassing situation for the President is evidenced by his query to the Chairman of the Faculty Relations Committee of the University regarding President Kerr's retirement date.¹¹ The latter offered no escape however, as he was not scheduled for retirement until October 1, 1944.

The Minister also received pressure from other sources to refuse to accept the resignations. Typical is the following request to Mr. Aberhart from the Alberta Dental Association:

Our Association respectfully urges that the resignations of Mr. H. H. Parlee as Chairman of the Board of Governors of the University of Alberta and of Dr. W. A. R. Kerr as President of the University be not accepted, believing as we do that such resignations would not be in the best interests of the University.

We also do not approve of the introduction of politics into the operation of a state seat of

¹⁰ Ibid., McNally to Aberhart, May 23, 1941.

¹¹ Ibid., Aberhart to Walker, May 25, 1941.

learning.¹²

Such pressure may have had its impact on the Minister. Early in July, H. H. Parlee was requested to accept re-appointment, which he did. Earlier still Aberhart had asked President Kerr to retain his position until a possible successor could be named.

While these moves cooled the situation to some extent, the President's determination to resign remained. In July he notified Aberhart as follows:

After giving the matter most careful consideration, I have regretfully decided that I must insist on the acceptance by the Government of the resignation of my position as President of the University of Alberta as contained in my letter of May 20 last.

. . . I am quite agreeable to remaining at my post pending your appointment of my successor, whether that be till October 31 or longer, if necessary from your point of view.

. . . May I express my warm appreciation of the happy relations which have existed between your Government and myself. Your own constant support I have especially valued.¹³

Thus Aberhart was obliged to accept the President's resignation. He declared publicly, however, that the resignation was on account of poor health. To President Kerr, Aberhart wrote:

After careful review of the whole matter from every angle, and taking into consideration your ill health, and the need of securing a successor at as early a date as possible, to assist in a survey of the University work, the Executive Council has decided

¹² Ibid., The Alberta Dental Association to Aberhart, May 27, 1941.

¹³ Ibid., Kerr to Aberhart, July 31, 1941.

to accept your resignation, the same to take place the end of August.¹⁴

That President Kerr may have been ill is of course possible. However, his earlier resignation was prompted by his untenable position and it was the latter which undoubtedly determined his course of action.

The aftermath of the events in May were not soon forgotten. Many of the public still felt that the University Senate had acted unjustly and demanded that some changes be made. A British Columbia Senator, J. W. de B. Ferris, in a letter to the Edmonton Bulletin expressed the sentiments of many when he wrote the following:

In the course of inquiry I am convinced that much of the trouble was caused by the Senate and by the existence of too much machinery in University affairs. If I had had the power I would have abolished the Senate altogether.¹⁵

The Minister also received opinions from others concerning the Senate. A former Albertan, Dr. W. H. Alexander, then teaching at Berkeley, California, told Aberhart flatly that, "I am of the opinion that the best way to deal with that body [the University Senate] is to abolish it altogether."¹⁶ These requests brought the government to action. According to the Deputy Minister, Dr. McNally, the government felt that the whole matter of university management

¹⁴ Ibid., Aberhart to Kerr, August 7, 1941.

¹⁵ Ibid., Edmonton Bulletin to Aberhart, August 9, 1941.

¹⁶ Ibid., Alexander to Aberhart, July 1, 1941.

as well as its general policies should be looked into. Accordingly, a survey committee consisting of the Chairman of the Board of Governors, the President of the University, the Deputy Minister of Education, the Supervisor of Schools, the Secretary of the Alberta Teachers' Association and a businessman, Mr. Francis G. Winspear, was appointed. "Every phase of university life was reviewed, and with surprising unanimity the committee produced a report recommending a new University Act."¹⁷

In March the new 'University Act, 1942' was passed. It contained several new clauses referring to the University Senate. One subsection stated that an appointed member of the Senate was only eligible for a maximum of two three-year appointments.¹⁸ This eased one of the areas of tension in regard to the Senate as some felt that the entrenchment of power within that body was one of its main weaknesses. Where before recommendations for honorary degrees belonged to the Senate, the new legislation placed the Senate clearly in a position of advisor to the University's Board of Governors. It became a major public relations body. The Senate had the responsibility "to hear submissions from any person or body interested in the University and with approval of the Board to inquire into

¹⁷ Coutts and Walker, p. 89.

¹⁸ Statutes of Alberta, 1942, 6 George VI, c.4, s.31.

any matters pertaining to the University and to make any recommendations it deems advisable to the Board or other appropriate body."¹⁹ Thus the powers of the Senate were greatly curtailed.

Aside from the political changes brought about by the denial of the honorary degree to the Minister, there have been many statements made in retrospect referring to this incident. Even obviously critical commentators of Aberhart gave him credit for doing an excellent job as Minister of Education and in supporting the government-endowed University of Alberta without making it a political issue.²⁰ Those closest to the Minister also made similar observations:

He was dedicated to education and it would have been completely foreign to his dedication to make a political issue of the University or the educational system. If there was anyone in the province that was eligible from the standpoint of contribution to education and public service, it would have been difficult to find anyone more deserving. . . Mr. Aberhart never talked about this [his being denied the honorary degree]. In fact I don't think he ever passed any comment on it, he certainly never made a public observation. He just let their decision [the Senate's] rest.²¹

That Aberhart received this slight had very little bearing on either his personal record or his activities as Minister.

¹⁹ Ibid., c.4, s.34.

²⁰ Barbara Moon, "Aberhart: The Man and the Shadow," Maclean's Magazine, March 15, 1953, p. 58.

²¹ Ernest C. Manning, May 25, 1970.

He was merely the victim, it would appear, of a very successful political spite on the part of a few individuals on the University Senate.

CHAPTER VII

GENERAL EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS 1935-1943

A number of minor educational problems were confronted by William Aberhart in his period as Minister of Education. The major problems were summarized by him as follows:

I take it that Alberta's schools were a fair example of the state of education in most of the provinces. We found that, (i) our school equipment and school buildings were in bad shape generally; (ii) many rural children were deprived of the opportunity to receive higher education, even highschool courses; (iii) the teachers' salaries were being left unpaid to an amount which had nearly reached a quarter of a million dollars; (iv) many schools were so deeply in debt that they were unable to arrange finances without full government aid; and (v) that petty squabbles were so prevalent in local school districts that the best work was impossible in the classroom.¹

In the autumn of 1935 a teaching colleague of the Minister, Charles M. Scarborough, had submitted a brief in which the picture he portrayed was just as dismal.² The problems of rundown school equipment, lack of high schools, and inadequate educational finance had largely been attacked by putting the large unit of school administration into effect.

¹ PAA., Minister's Papers. "Address to Conference of Federated Womens' Institutes." October 10, 1939.

² Supra, p. 88, n. 39.

This halted the accumulation of debts in unpaid teachers' salaries although the amount in arrears which had already accumulated continued to be a problem. Individual issues, which to the outsider may appear to be of limited consequence, were also to cause minor problems for the Minister. Of these, the ones of most concern to him as evidenced in his papers, include the qualification of electors of local school boards, patriotic exercises and the theory of evolution in the classroom, and the meeting of the arrears in teachers' salaries.

The U.F.A. Government during its last session in the Alberta Legislature had passed an amendment to the School Act of 1931 defining the qualifications of an elector for school elections. The amendment assented to on April 23, 1935, presented one clause that was later to become a problem for the new administration and the Minister. It stated:

Provided always that in any district which has been established more than ten years, after the tenth year of its establishment the expression elector shall not include any person who is not a British subject.³

This restriction, in combination with a piece of legislation assented to on March 28, 1931, known as "An Act to Consolidate and Amend The School Assessment Act," was to be a major issue in some areas of the province and a minor problem to be faced by the Minister. This latter legislation

³ Statutes of Alberta, 1935, 26 George V, c.44, s.s.1-11.

dealt with a compulsory school tax of four dollars and stated:

Subject to the approval of the Minister, any school board may by resolution fix a minimum tax to be paid by any resident of the district assessed upon the assessment and tax roll, at the sum of four dollars, and also impose upon every resident of the district of the full age of twenty-one years who has resided therein for a period of one month or more during any calendar year, and is gainfully employed, and has not been assessed on the roll, an annual tax of four dollars for school purposes, whether he has resided in the district before the date of the completion of the roll or not; but in the case of the collection of such tax the name of such resident so paying shall be added to the roll for the said calendar year.⁴

This legislation thus made possible the collection of the annual school tax contingent upon age, gainful employment and one month's residency. The former legislation disallowing electors who were not British subjects, even though they could be taxed, became a source of contention. The Minister received several resolutions demanding the removal of the "British subject" clause, essentially from coal-mining areas, where the foreign-born were dominant.⁵

⁴ Statutes of Alberta, 1931, 22 George V, c.33, s.30. Hereafter cited Statutes of Alberta, 1931.

⁵ PAA., Minister's Papers. Resolutions and requests received by the Minister in this regard included: Blairmore Local Union No. 7295 of U.M.W.A., September 30, 1937; Town Council of Blairmore, October 13, 1937; Bellevue Local Union of U.M.W.A. No. 7294, October 14, 1937; Nordegg Local Union of U.M.W.A. No. 7298, October 19, 1937; Edmonton and District Unions of U.M.W.A. Nos. 4119, 6783 and 6784, October 20, 1937; Nacine Local Union of U.M.W.A. No. 4465, October 28, 1937.

A request from the Town Council of Blairmore to the Minister is typical:

We request the deletion of a phrase from the School Act Section in defining an elector as follows . . . 'provided that such a person is a British Subject.' This Council feels that as these people are being taxed they are unjustly treated by being disenfranchised.⁶

The Minister's replies were also somewhat typical. He initially reminded those responsible that many who were so taxed had children who were receiving the benefits of education in the areas in which they resided, even though they did not vote. His next point stressed that any resident could take out naturalization papers and qualify as a British subject within the specified period if he so desired.

Although legislation removing this clause was never passed, the issue really constituted a minor problem for the Minister. Upon examination of the Minister's papers it can be found that no further submissions were received in this regard. Interest in the issue appears to have been localized and sporadic. It is notable that no evidence exists in the Minister's papers supporting the restriction of qualification of electors.

A second minor educational problem which faced William Aberhart as Minister of Education concerned patriotic exercises in the classroom. The School Act of 1931 had made

⁶ Ibid., Town Council of Blairmore to Aberhart, October 13, 1937.

saluting of the Union Jack and standing at attention during the opening exercises in any classroom mandatory if the local school board so directed.⁷ Problems naturally arose. One communication from an irate father to the Minister complained that his daughter had been expelled for failing to salute the flag even though "her religious beliefs did not allow her to do so."⁸ Another parent who had four children expelled for refusing to salute the flag complained from another angle: "We fully believe in the Canadian flag as a symbol of freedom and are as loyal to it as any citizen of Canada, but when the symbol of freedom becomes a tool of compulsion, that is very certainly not making for loyal citizens."⁹ The major problem was that many regarded flag saluting as a form of worship.¹⁰

The Minister, in meeting these cases, was fortunate to have some fairly recent legislation to help him. An amendment on April 8, 1941, to the School Act of 1931 had added the following subsections to section 146:

146a.(1) In any school patriotic exercises shall be conducted at such times and places and in such manner as the Board may from time to time direct.
(2) In any case where the Board directs that the flag shall be saluted, this patriotic exercise

⁷ Statutes of Alberta, 1931, c.32, s.146.

⁸ PAA., Minister's Papers. Tulloch to Aberhart, February 17, 1943.

⁹ Ibid., Jehr to Aberhart, February 1, 1943.

¹⁰ Ibid., Downing to Aberhart, January 20, 1942.

may be conducted in the following manner: The teacher and the pupils shall stand facing the flag and upon the command of the teacher, the senior pupil, or any other pupil who may be designated by the teacher for this purpose, the teacher and the pupils shall come to attention and shall remain standing silently and at attention while the teacher, senior pupil, or other designated pupil, salutes the flag.¹¹

Thus the Minister was able to point out that not everyone had actually to salute the flag. He also had a set reply to those who regarded patriotic exercises as a form of worship:

I would consider that a boy who would not lift his hat to a lady because he felt that it was an act of worship would be misinformed.¹²

The saluting of the flag is much on a par with the lifting of one's hat to a lady on the street. It really means that you are courteously paying your respect to what these stand for - womanhood on the one hand and the country on the other.¹³

Despite the inaccuracy of the parallel drawn, such replies seem not to have been questioned by those to whom they were directed. The Minister also reminded those who had children expelled for this reason that it was really too high a price to pay for something so small. In some cases he showed direct personal interest by requesting a reply to his suggestions of upholding the School Act of 1931 and the

¹¹ Statutes of Alberta, 1941, 5 George VI, c.35, s.10.

¹² PAA., Minister's Papers. Aberhart to Jehr, February 8, 1943.

¹³ Ibid., Aberhart to Tulloch, February 24, 1943.

newer amendment.¹⁴ One parent happily reported that his children were now back at school and that they would stand at attention but not actually salute.¹⁵ This seems to have been the most satisfactory solution to this minor but difficult educational problem.

The issue of patriotic exercises was also a source of slight agitation for the Minister from an entirely different direction, namely, from those wishing more uniformity and regimentation in patriotic exercises. The following resolution expressed the position of this faction:

Be it resolved that this Local go on record as urging the Provincial Govt. to enact a law making it compulsory for all children attending schools in Alberta to salute the flag and sing 'God Save the King' when requested.¹⁶

The Minister also received resolutions from such patriotic groups as the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire, who not only advocated the above, but also that these exercises be observed daily.¹⁷ Aberhart, in reply to these requests, answered by referring to the School Act. Patriotic exercises were to be conducted as the local school boards

¹⁴ Ibid., Aberhart to Jehr, February 8, 1943.

¹⁵ Ibid., Jehr to Aberhart, March 9; 1943.

¹⁶ Ibid., Clover Bar Local of the A.T.A. to Aberhart, December 7, 1940.

¹⁷ Ibid., Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire, Provincial Chapter of Alberta to Aberhart, May 20 and November 1, 1940.

directed and this was a decision over which he as Minister had no control. This issue was thus minor in nature and was a problem which was never totally solved as the public who complained either had not even seen the School Act or were not aware of its provisions.

Still another minor but important problem faced by the Minister involved the issue of the theory of evolution in Alberta classrooms. Because the Minister had been closely tied to the Fundamental Baptist Church in western Canada both as a preacher and Biblical teacher, it is likely that he received far stronger protests than might otherwise have been the case. Aberhart had continued to have his Sunday broadcasts even after becoming Premier, and his 'Radio Sunday School' had a vast audience of children and adults alike. Thus when a science book appeared in the intermediate grades which explained the theory of evolution, protests came to the Minister in the form of a religious admonition. One parent even demanded, "I would like to ask you sir. Are you teaching over 9,000 children on Sunday to believe the Bible, as a man of God, and six days of the week, as minister of education, teaching them Darwin?"¹⁸ Another complained that a certain text stated that man was on the earth 100,000 years ago, in direct contrast to the Bible which states that "man was created on the earth, only

¹⁸ Ibid., Hebbes to Aberhart, February 26, 1936.

6,000 years ago."¹⁹ Still another parent was sorely vexed because H. G. Well's Outline of History which "teaches" evolution appeared on a Grade X social studies reading list.²⁰

It is to the Minister's credit that in all these protests he replied as head of Alberta's Department of Education and not as head of the Fundamental Baptist movement. In reference to the science book the Minister replied:

The General Science book is careful not to teach positively one theory or another but you must surely admit that our children should be acquainted with the theories advanced by men of the past and which are held by some men today.²¹

In reply to the second complaint, Aberhart merely declared that he himself as a Bible student and teacher, was not prepared to refute scientific findings and pointedly asked, "Are you prepared to accept without reservation that the Biblical creation occurred exactly 6,000 years ago?"²² The Minister also had a typical answer to complaints such as the one against the use of H. G. Well's, Outline of

¹⁹ Ibid., Bell to Aberhart, October 7, 1935.

²⁰ Ibid., More to Aberhart, February 24, 1938.

²¹ Ibid., Aberhart to Stevens, March 10, 1939.

²² Ibid., Aberhart to Bell, October 19, 1935.

As a Fundamentalist, Mr. Aberhart had often followed the Millennialist school of thought which utilized the Bible to point to seven distinct dispensations of time, which many scholars and students alike held were of 1,000 years each. See also Mann, p. 5.

History:

You will, of course, appreciate the fact that teachers and students may consult a reference book for a particular purpose without necessarily agreeing with the author's general views on the subject. There are very few books in any reference library expressing views that meet the approval of all of the readers who make use of them.²³

The issue of evolution in the classroom also concerned some public organizations and the Minister received one resolution which typifies the sentiments of many. It was presented as follows:

Due to the present day trend towards Godlessness and towards the acceptance of the theory of evolution, be it resolved: That the Provincial Government be asked to make compulsory the daily reading of a passage from the New Testament in the schools of this province, without comment from the teacher.²⁴

Aside from the compulsion involved, the School Act of 1931 had already made possible religious exercises in the classroom. It stated:

All schools shall be opened by the reading, without explanation or comment, of a passage of scripture to be selected from those prescribed or approved for that purpose by the Minister to be followed by the recitation of the Lord's prayer: Provided that any Board may, by resolution, dispense with the scripture reading or the recitation of the Lord's prayer or both.²⁵

Thus in reply to requests for making religious exercises

²³ Ibid., Aberhart to More, March 8, 1938.

²⁴ Ibid., Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire, Provincial Chapter of Alberta to Aberhart, November 1, 1940.

²⁵ Statutes of Alberta, 1931, c.32, s.147.

compulsory the Minister was able to refer to the above Act.

The issue of the theory of evolution was one to which the Minister devoted some direct personal interest. During the spring and summer of 1942, Aberhart in collaboration with a devoted school teaching colleague, Mabel Giles, wrote a pamphlet entitled "The Theory of Evolution. Can it be Proven?"²⁶ Miss Giles accomplished most of the revisions and stated that the value of the pamphlet would be that it gave both sides of the story.²⁷ Its major emphasis was that the theory of evolution was theory. While this pamphlet was never utilized in the schools, it was an attempt to curtail acceptance of evolution²⁸ as indicated by its conclusion:

The facts disclosed by scientific enquiry in the fields of inorganic and of organic matter, far from supporting the Evolutionary Theory, in reality contradict and vigorously militate against it. All wide-awake students should recognize this fact and form their conclusions in accordance therewith.²⁹

While the issue involved in evolutionary theory was never of major import, the Minister did have considerable

²⁶ PAA., Minister's Papers. "The Theory of Evolution. Can it be Proven?"

²⁷ Ibid., Giles to Aberhart, June 11, 1942 and July 28, 1942.

²⁸ This pamphlet was compiled by William Aberhart as a private citizen and not under him as Minister of Education.

²⁹ Supra, p. 123, n. 26.

interest in solving any problems associated with it. While it could safely be stated that this issue directly appealed to the Minister as a devoted religious practitioner, he was nonetheless practical and judicious in any replies or decisions he made concerning it as the Minister of Education.

Financial questions and problems facing William Aberhart as Minister were also numerous. One financial problem, in particular, he directly inherited from the previous U.F.A. administration; namely unpaid teachers' salaries which by 1935 totalled nearly 250,000 dollars. This problem was one of the reasons why the teachers had generally supported the large units of administration and the Teachers Profession Act. However, even as late as the fall of 1938 the Minister still received requests from teachers direly in need of their back pay.³⁰ In reply to a teachers' request for back pay from the Whitecourt area the Minister stated:

There are many teachers in that area whose salaries are in arrears. We are having a survey made of the situation to see how great the total amount is. When that information is before us we hope to work out some solution for the whole district.³¹

The Minister, however, through the large divisions was able

³⁰ PAA., Minister's Papers. Graham to Aberhart, October 1, 1938.

³¹ Ibid., Aberhart to Graham, October 18, 1938.

to offer some consolation to teachers. A special report published by order of the Minister on the large divisions after three years of operation stated:

The Divisional Boards representing extensive areas and large resources are able to finance the operation of schools more efficiently than local boards. They have little difficulty in securing loans from the banks to tide them over periods when their funds are short. Accordingly, the divisions are able, with rare exceptions, to pay salaries monthly as they become due.³²

Thus the Minister could point to the success of the large divisions in halting the accumulation of arrears. They did far more than this, however, as the report made clear under a section entitled "Overdue Liabilities":

At the time of the setting up of divisions \$244,428 of teachers' salaries remained unpaid. The divisions attacked this problem and, with the help of the Department which made Special Grants for this purpose in the case of divisions having limited resources, had paid \$158,544 of this amount by the end of 1939. Where arrears of salaries are yet unpaid, the divisions have a definite policy of retiring a certain amount each year. Fortunately, only twelve divisions have at the time of writing to carry out such a policy, since the remaining thirty-four are now clear of this kind of debt.³³

Aberhart thus was able to report most favorably on the alleviation of this problem. However, to finally clear up all of the arrears it was necessary to have access to large public funds. In speaking of this achievement the Deputy Minister, G. Fred McNally reported:

³² Alberta Government, Department of Education, After Three Years. (1940), p. 22.

³³ Ibid., p. 30.

I had the accountants of the Department compute from the term returns all sums reported by teachers as due them and certified as correct by the secretary-treasurers. . . I asked Mr. Aberhart to present legislation to authorize these payments from provincial monies. This was a bold proposal since we were still in the depression and money was very scarce. He considered for a moment and said, "Why wait for the session (then five or six months away)? We can do it by Order-in-Council and have it ratified later." Thus the money was provided and all arrears were paid. Of course, under the divisional organization the cause of such a situation could never arise again.³⁴

Thus though the arrears had been accumulated before the advent of the Social Credit party in 1935, it was the new administration's responsibility to pay them, a responsibility which was met as quickly as the financial stringencies of the period allowed.

The more prominent of the minor educational problems faced by the Minister from 1935 to 1943 included the issue of qualification of electors for school elections, the issues of patriotic exercises and the theory of evolution in the classroom, and the arrears in teaching salaries. Judging from the amount of correspondence on these subjects, none of them were of any great over-all concern to the public in general. However, Aberhart through his office was generally able to quiet the complaints associated with these issues. Having legislation readily available in the form of the School Act also proved of great assistance to him in meeting these problems fairly. In general most of

³⁴ Coutts and Walker, p. 75.

the complaints received, with the exception of the arrears in teachers' salaries, might well have never been expressed had the party concerned been conversant with this Act.

CHAPTER VIII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The central issues discussed in this thesis were focused upon the following three questions:

- (i) To what extent were William Aberhart and Social Credit responsible for the major changes in educational policy and practice of the period 1935 to 1943?
- (ii) What were the educational problems of the period 1935 to 1943 as seen through the Ministerial papers of William Aberhart?
- (iii) What solutions were offered by the Minister in attempting to alleviate the discontent associated with these problems?

The investigations made by the writer in searching for answers to these questions has led to the following summary and conclusions.

When William Aberhart and Social Credit won the provincial election in 1935, they came to power with a mandate for change. As Alberta's new Minister of Education, Aberhart embarked immediately upon changes in educational policy and practice. In April 1936, the legal framework for establishing large units of school administration was passed by the government. In this same sitting of the Legislature legislation was also passed making membership in the Alberta Teachers' Association compulsory for all Alberta teachers. In September 1936, the introduction of the enterprise curriculum and methodology into Alberta's classrooms began. The fact that these major changes took place within one year

of Aberhart's becoming Minister of Education has been the subject of controversy. While some have argued that Aberhart was totally responsible for these changes,¹ others have viewed his part in a more limited context.²

The possibility of establishing the large units of school administration in Alberta had been proposed by the U.F.A. government. Perren Baker as Minister of Education had been particularly active in proposing their adoption. Baker had also supported the teachers of the province in attempting to make membership in their association compulsory. Curriculum revision for Alberta's elementary schools was begun in 1934. Thus the ideas for change in Alberta's educational policy and practice, which transpired during the first year that Aberhart and Social Credit were in office, were being considered in the earlier period. The U.F.A. government and Perren Baker had been so fearful of political reprisals from the electorate that none of these changes had been put into practice.³ From their predecessors Aberhart and his government merely carried forth those programs which to them were best. The legislation they passed in April 1936, while taking the form of amendments to previous legislation, did come to grips with

¹ Johnson and MacNutt, p. 186.

² Chalmers, p. 99.

³ Wilson, pp. 45-47.

the major issues. Whereas the U.F.A. legislation had left the formation of large school units and membership in the Alberta Teachers' Association entirely optional to the electorate and the teachers respectively, the legislation of 1936 legally established the large units and the compulsory membership. Aberhart as Minister of Education was particularly active in realizing both of these changes. In February 1936, Aberhart stated that the large unit of school administration was a scheme "very near to his heart."⁴ One of Aberhart's closest associates in the Department of Education, Dr. G. Fred McNally, states that the enhancement of the teaching profession held particular "appeal to Aberhart."⁵

The Minister's papers demonstrate the active concern Aberhart had for the program his department pursued. That the large units were an issue of much concern to him is evident from the volume of public response to their introduction. Petitions and resolutions both in opposition and in support of the large units were numerous. Most supporting correspondence was received in 1936, while opposition was most evident in the following year. By the beginning of 1937 the value of the large units was being demonstrated and despite the opposition Aberhart continued

⁴ The Albertan, February 5, 1936.

⁵ Coutts and Walker, p. 71.

steadfastly to complete this program.

Regarding the legislation passed on behalf of the teachers in Alberta, the Minister's papers indicate that the Alberta Teachers' Association had been particularly active in pressing their demands upon Aberhart. He appears to have been very responsive to them. Many of the Minister's speeches indicate that Aberhart consistently supported the teachers in spite of the opposition from the Alberta Trustees' Association. As a former school teacher and principal, Aberhart realized the importance of a strong provincial teachers' association and he zealously supported the teachers in their struggle for strengthening their position.

Curriculum revision for Alberta's elementary classrooms, although begun in 1934, was also an issue of concern to Aberhart. His Ministerial papers indicate that he was continually informed as to developments in this area. While invitations to attend various curriculum committee discussions were received by the Minister, his papers reveal that he most often chose not to attend. Dr. H. C. Newland as Chief Inspector of Schools in charge of curriculum revision, continually forwarded condensed reports of the various committee meetings to the Minister. Aberhart utilized the same group of educational specialists for the various committees as had been chosen by the U.F.A. administration in 1934 and early 1935. The Minister's personal participation

in making the actual revisions, however, appears to have been rather limited.

William Aberhart and Social Credit were centrally involved in carrying forward these major educational changes. While the previous administration had discussed these changes and brought them to public attention, nothing constructive by way of implementation had resulted. Aberhart and his government could have pursued an entirely different course of action; however, they chose to utilize what they regarded as the best programs available for educational change. They did evidence a commitment to change.

As well as the various problems associated with the major educational changes of the period, the Minister's papers indicate that several other problems confronted Aberhart. Among these were: the denial of an honorary degree to the Minister by the University of Alberta, the determination of the qualification of electors in school elections, the place of patriotic exercises and the theory of evolution in Alberta's classrooms, and the payment of salary arrears to deserving teachers. The denial of the honorary degree was the subject of much controversy, embarrassment, and political speculation. Although much discussion of political reprisal against the University of Alberta took place in some circles, no retaliation as such resulted. The Minister was merely the victim of a very successful political spite.

The qualification of electors in school elections was met squarely with the definition of 'elector' as contained in the School Act of 1931. The Minister also reminded members of the public that naturalization papers were the shortest method of qualifying as an elector as many of the complainers had been in Canada a sufficient number of years to follow this procedure. With regard to patriotic exercises in the classroom, the Minister also utilized the School Act of 1931, which had delegated authority over this matter to the local school boards. The addition of certain subsections to this Act in 1941⁶ was also utilized by Aberhart in relieving the distress over this issue.

The theory of evolution in the classroom was an area of concern to the Minister because of his particular religious background. Nearly all of the complaints in this regard as contained in the Minister's papers, made their appeals to Aberhart because he was a "religious man." The importance of the theory of evolution as a theory was the major reply the Minister had for those who complained. Reference textbooks which were often the subject of attack were never censored by the Minister. Agreement with an author's particular viewpoint was not a necessary condition for reading a book as far as Aberhart was concerned.

⁶ Supra, p. 118, n. 11.

The problem of unpaid teachers' salaries was inherited by the Minister when he came to office. The Minister's papers indicate that with resources so limited this problem was particularly perplexing to the many teachers involved. Aberhart, through the large units with the accompanying uniformity of taxation, began a program to meet this problem. The arrears were one of the very first debits cleared away as economies were made in the large units.

In relieving the distress associated with these more general educational problems faced by the Minister, his papers indicate that he consistently acted promptly. Although he was often bound to making certain subjective judgments by the objective means of the School Act and other legislation, Aberhart appears to have been as fair in solving distress as his position as Minister would allow.

Thus from the writer's review of the Minister's papers for the period 1936-1943, it is concluded that the major issues with which Aberhart was concerned were the large unit and compulsory teacher membership in their association. One of the other major concerns of the period, the new curriculum and methodology, did not receive as much of his personal attention.

It would seem from the content of the Minister's papers that Aberhart's activity as Minister of Education was not his most significant area of political responsibility. During his Ministry, he demonstrated his ability as an administrator, calling upon the officials of the Department to provide the initiative and direction for educational changes.

Recommendations for Further Study

Studies related to the subject of this thesis might be as follows:

- (i) due to Aberhart's limited involvement in curriculum revision, studies of the activities of the more prominent curriculum revisors such as Olive Fisher, Dr. W.E. Hay and Miss Donalda Dickie would undoubtedly give further insight into the changes of the period.
- (ii) because of Aberhart's concern with educational change and with political issues, many educational problems became the responsibility of the Deputy Minister, and hence a study of his activities would add much to completing the total picture of the educational problems of the period.
- (iii) in that Dr. G. Fred McNally served in several positions in the Department of Education both in the U.F.A. and Social Credit administrations, a study of his life would add much to our understanding of education under both governments.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

ALBERTA TRUSTEES' ASSOCIATION

RESOLUTION NO. 1, FEBRUARY 22, 1936

WHEREAS this meeting of the ratepayers of _____ School District No. _____ of the Province of Alberta, is of the opinion that the proposed Act altering in principle the present system and constitution of Rural School Districts by setting up large units of administration for rural schools is not in the best interests for providing education to children resident in Rural School Districts for the following reasons, namely:

- (a) That said proposed Act deprives the inhabitants in the presently existing Districts of their present local autonomy in respect to school matters.
- (b) That said proposed Act will (no evidence to contrary having been shown) increase the cost of education.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that this meeting go on record as being opposed to the establishment of the larger units of administration for rural school purposes and that a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the Minister of Education and to _____ M.L.A. our representative in the Alberta legislature.

APPENDIX B

SUPPORT FOR THE LARGE UNIT

Letters, petitions, and resolutions of support for the large units of school administration received by the Minister, 1935-1943, as contained in the Ministers' papers. Provincial Chapter of the International Order to the Daughters of the Empire, Edmonton, October 21, 1935.

S.G. Davies, Clyde	November 25, 1935
C.D. Denny, Cereal	January 9, 1936
T. Glen, Calgary	January 10, 1936
Duclos Social Credit Group	January 27, 1936
Village of Evergreen	February 3, 1936
Council of Municipal District of Flagstaff	February 7, 1936
H.J. Grey, Hairy Hill	February 11, 1936
Didsbury Social Credit Group	February 21, 1936
F.J. Milaney, Beaverdam	February 27, 1936
Town Council of Grande Prairie	March 10, 1936
L.A. Toole, Medicine Hat	July 25, 1936
Alberta Social Credit League, Lethbridge	October 6, 1936
Minburn Social Credit Group	January 12, 1938
J.G. Dobry, Phillips	March 10, 1939
G. Galigan, Culp	December 27, 1939

APPENDIX C

OPPOSITION TO THE LARGE UNIT

Letters, petitions, and resolutions opposing the large units of school administration received by the Minister, 1935 -1943, as contained in the Ministers' papers.

M.D. Flagstaff, Loughheed	February 7, 1936
William Griffiths, Grande Prairie	February 16, 1936
M.D. of Vimy, Big Valley	February 19, 1936
Blueberry Valley Social Credit Group, Leslieville	March 9, 1936 and March 23, 1937
Board of Trustees of South Edmonton School District No. 3144	July 25, 1936
Windsor School District, Blackie	June 12, 1937
M.D. of Dinton No. 189, Blackie	June 16, 1937
Painter Creek School District, Galahad	July 2, 1937 and October 12, 1937
Apremont School District, Galahad	July 2, 1937 and October 12, 1937
Farrow School District, Okotoks	July 8, 1937
Blackie School District, Blackie	July 14, 1937
Kalusz School District No. 1631 Chipman	July 22, 1937
Swan Creek School District, Lamont	July 24, 1937
Macleod School District, Macleod	August 2, 1937
Strome School District, Strome	August 11, 1937 and October 14, 1937
Holden School District, Holden	October 17, 1937

Beaver Creek School District No. 371, Star	November 10, 1937
Caledonia School District No. 2485	November 19, 1937
A.J. Tangen, Holden	January 6, 1938
Krakow School District, Lamont	January 12, 1938
Bruderheim School District No. 537	January 15, 1938 and February 2, 1938
Huwen School District No. 1457, Krakow	February 11, 1938
Flatbush School District	August 19, 1938
Haultain U.F.A. Local No. 843	September 8, 1938
Federal School District, Derwent	December 12, 1938
Pathfinder School District	January 15, 1939
Pincher Station School District Ratepayers	February 10, 1940

APPENDIX D

WILLIAM ABERHART'S STATEMENT OF SOCIAL CREDIT
PRINCIPLES FOR A PROPOSED TEXTBOOK, AUGUST 10, 1936

SOCIAL CREDIT is necessitated by the fact that there is never sufficient purchasing power distributed at any one time to purchase the goods and services available. This produces a surplus of goods resulting in unemployment and poverty in the midst of plenty. The Social Credit proposals are designed to solve this problem of poverty by creating a system whereby purchasing power will be provided in such a manner and in such a quantity that the goods and services which modern society is capable of producing may be adequately distributed so that consumption may be equated with real and potential production.

The principles of Social Credit are based on three main concepts:

(1) Cultural Heritage. This is the inherent right of every bonafide citizen who willingly co-operates with his fellow citizens to share in the wealth of our natural resources made available by scientific knowledge, invention, and all the modern means of production.

(2) Basic Dividends. This term represents the method by which this inherent right of the citizen may be made effective. The Government would distribute a basic or citizenship dividend to such bonafide citizen co-operat

ing, to enable him to purchase his basic share of the wealth. This dividend is separate from and additional to any earnings otherwise secured by him.

(3) Unearned Increments. The balance between production and consumption is maintained by the issuance of dividends and the recovery of redundant credit through an unearned increment levy returned to the Government on each turnover of goods and services. Unearned increment is the margin of value created by the decrease in the cost of the goods through specialization and mass production. These are made possible in a community where the association of the individuals gives rise to greater demand and the resulting increased turnover.

Social Credit principles are made effective by the use of the people's credit apart from financial credit. They are based on the concept of money as a medium of exchange rather than as a commodity for profit.

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